

JUDAISM

Taking the Argo to Nineveh: Jonah and Jason

Gildas Hamel

The Murder of Walther Rathenau

Carole Fink

Religion and Politics in Israel and Jerusalem

Ira Sharkansky

Conservative Rabbis, Their Movement, and American Judaism

Gerald L. Zelizer

In Response

Jonathan D. Sarna, Jenna Weissman Joselit, Henry Feingold

Women and Kaddish

Joel B. Wolowelsky

Jacob's Limp

Schneir Levin

On Yom Kippur

Frances Degen Horowitz

Jonah's Journey

David Zucker

The Golem and Reproductive Biotechnology

Byron L. Sherwin

The Moment of Death in Medieval and Modern Times

Elliott Horowitz

Reviews

William Nicholls, Edward S. Shapiro

Poetry

Mark Neider, Hilda Raz, Marc J. Straus

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<i>The Murder of Walther Rathenau</i>	CAROLE FINK	259
<i>The Jews of Europe and the Moment of Death in Medieval and Modern Times</i>	ELLIOTT HOROWITZ	271
<i>Women and Kaddish</i>	JOEL B. WOLOWELSKY	282
<i>Conservative Rabbis, Their Movement, and American Judaism</i>	GERALD L. ZELIZER	292
<i>Response</i>	JONATHAN D. SARNA	304
	JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT	309
	HENRY FEINGOLD	311
<i>The Golem, Zevi Ashkenazi, and Reproductive Biotechnology</i>	BYRON L. SHERWIN	314
<i>Jacob's Limp</i>	SCHNEIR LEVIN	325
<i>Religion and Politics in Israel and Jerusalem</i>	IRA SHARKANSKY	328
<i>Taking the Argo to Nineveh: Jonah and Jason in a Mediterranean Context</i>	GILDAS HAMEL	341
<i>Jonah's Journey</i>	DAVID ZUCKER	362
FROM ALL THEIR HABITATIONS		
<i>On Yom Kippur</i>	FRANCES DEGEN HOROWITZ	369
REVIEWS		
<i>Writing Religious History</i>	WILLIAM NICHOLLS	373
<i>Black-Jewish Relations Revisited</i>	EDWARD S. SHAPIRO	379
POETRY		
<i>Covered Mirrors</i>	MARK NEIDER	291
<i>Insomnia again, Isaac Stern's Performance</i>	HILDA RAZ	323
<i>The Day Stalin Died, 19332</i>	MARC J. STRAUS	360

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The Murder of Walther Rathenau

C A R O L E F I N K

ON JUNE 24, 1922, GERMANY'S FIRST (AND ONLY) Jewish foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, was shot and murdered by two young right-wing former German officers. The assassination, less than six months after Rathenau's appointment, was shocking both in its brutality *and* in its expectedness. Albert Einstein was stunned. Heeding his friends' warnings of "widespread anti-Semitism," he canceled all his lectures; although refusing to escape from Berlin, he was "officially absent."¹ A few hundred miles away in Prague, Franz Kafka observed: "Incredible that he lived as long as he did; already two months ago we heard rumors of his murder."² In London, the *Spectator's* obituary began: "... as little a surprise as a murder can well be."³

Many observers denied, or minimized, anti-Semitism as a motive force in Rathenau's murder, either stressing its *structural* and *political* causes (Weimar Germany's volatile mixture of anti-republicanism, anti-bolshevism, and anti-Westernism, its armed bands of militant right-wing youths, and its woefully disunited center and left) or the *personal* dimension, Rathenau's unpopularity among almost every segment of German opinion. In mirror image, the German and European left created a mythical Rathenau, transforming the industrialist/war leader into a "sacrifice" for the good Germany—as much a victim of the Allies' intransigence as of German right-wing bullets.⁴ But these political Rathenaus—Rathenau as another martyr of Weimar's fragile democracy—disregard the flesh-and-blood reality of the time, which we must retrieve.

Who was Walther Rathenau? An exotic, complex, and tragic figure, his life and work encompassed powerful opposites, as exemplified in the huge and impressive exhibition two years ago at the German Historical Museum in Berlin.⁵ He was a direct descendant of the German and Jewish Enlightenment which valued reason and science but also the arts, music, and literature. An industrialist, social philosopher, and statesman, he attained the highest government office ever reached by a German Jew. As foreign minister, he steered the wobbly Weimar Republic in two directions—towards reconciliation with the Entente and rapprochement with Soviet Russia. As a marked victim of political

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and racial assassins and now the subject of several biographies, he is a challenging figure of contemporary history.⁶

Born in 1867, Walther Rathenau was a true child of imperial Germany and its emancipated Jews. His father, Emil Rathenau, founded the huge centralized conglomerate, AEG, the German General Electric Company. Following his dutiful study of engineering, Walther Rathenau did his business apprenticeship in various AEG subsidiaries before returning to Berlin at age thirty-two; he continued to travel throughout Europe and to South America and Africa. Within the next decade he succeeded his father at the helm of AEG, also served on numerous boards, and became one of Europe's major economic leaders.⁷

The other Walther Rathenau sought an influential position in the German intellectual firmament. He was a talented musician and painter, an avid art collector and raconteur, a brilliant linguist and man of letters who produced five didactic volumes on contemporary and philosophical issues. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, the dominant figure of his age, Rathenau lauded the creative spirit who labored to win things eternal and divine. A latter day utopian socialist, Rathenau called for state regulation to subordinate personal interest to the needs of the community and an international organization to control trade, finance, and raw materials.⁸

Like many Jews of his generation who had attained wealth and held intellectual and social pretensions, Rathenau subordinated his Jewishness to his Germanness—perhaps with more fervency than most. In 1897 he characterized his people as “a separate and alien race,” and asserted his complete devotion to Germany and to the German people. When he called his people “the salt of the earth,” he added that too much salt produced an unsavory diet.⁹ Rathenau argued vehemently against Zionism on ideological and practical grounds.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he refused to follow his contemporaries Karl Kraus, Franz Werfel, and Kurt Tucholsky into conversion.

Rathenau endured the pain and humiliation of being Jewish in Wilhelmine Germany. His was an undoubtedly second-class citizenship which barred him, for example, from obtaining the socially indispensable officer's commission in the imperial army. If his wealth and good manners made him admissible to Berlin's salons and the Imperial court—he conversed with the kaiser on many occasions—Rathenau recognized that “all the ability and accomplishment cannot free [the German Jew] from this condition.”¹¹ He nonetheless refused to renounce his ancestral faith. Was it out of loyalty to his parents, respect for an ancient tradition, or his dogged attachment to outsiderhood? This man who loved to bring simplicity to technical problems and complexity to human ones sustained a Jewish identity which reinforced both extremes of his externality from, and adherence to, the German people.¹²

The outbreak of World War I gave Walther Rathenau the opportunity to serve the German people in their hour of need. Like the ardent nationalist Fritz Haber, but unlike his pacifist countryman Albert Einstein, he rallied to the war effort. During the first nine months Rathenau personally organized and

directed the army unit set up to procure the raw materials and labor which were indispensable for the Reich's survival.¹³ Eased out of office by the military, Rathenau turned to philosophy and writing, and even to a brief study of Hasidism under Martin Buber's guidance.¹⁴ His German patriotism was sorely tested by the arrogance of the general staff, by the kaiser's equivocations, and by Germany's political and military blunders. He opposed the imperialist treaty of Brest-Litovsk. When the western front collapsed in 1918, Rathenau vainly, and virtually alone, called for armed civilian resistance; he also opposed signing the Treaty of Versailles.¹⁵

Rathenau, the quintessential outsider, held a special vision of, and distance from, the German people. Well over six feet tall, with dark piercing eyes and a white goatee, he had a striking resemblance to Lenin. This brilliant, exotic looking bachelor was resented by the German upper classes for his "socialist tendencies," distrusted by the lower classes as a plutocrat, and a stranger to his own people whom he had mocked in print. (Einstein once remarked that Rathenau would be the Pope if he could!) Rathenau built a handsome villa in the affluent suburb of Grunewald; but when he moved among the literary, artistic, and business circles of middle-class Berlin he was invariably alone.¹⁶ In February 1919 a telegram arrived at the Constituent Assembly in Weimar nominating Rathenau for the presidency of the new German Republic which provoked uproarious laughter from the delegates on the Right and silence from the rest.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the beleaguered new Weimar Republic soon needed Rathenau's considerable financial and leadership talents which he had acquired as the head of the AEG. In 1920, he worked for the Socialization Commission and skillfully represented Germany at the Spa Conference on reparations. In July 1921, Rathenau accepted a cabinet post as minister of reconstruction, swallowing his desire for the top job of foreign minister. During the next five months, he applied his skills and energy to the policy of "fulfillment," arranging compromises with France, Belgium, and Britain over Germany's huge reparations bill.¹⁸

Adept at bargaining with foreign statesmen and industrialists, Walther Rathenau was able to blunt the Allies' fears and suspicions of Germany and appeal to their generosity. He depicted a weak Germany, with tense industrial-labor relations and a fragile currency, menaced within by right- and left-wing radicalism and by regional divisions and threatened in the East by Soviet Russia, and thus incapable of paying reparations without immediate loans and moratoria. Despite the forcefulness of his message, or perhaps because his convictions seemed so solid, Rathenau came to be considered an "indispensable" figure in European politics. The more he succeeded abroad, however, the more his domestic enemies could label him the international Jew.¹⁹

On January 30, 1922 (exactly eleven years before Hitler's appointment to power), Walther Rathenau was finally placed at the helm of the foreign ministry. It was the eve of the world economic conference to be held at Genoa, the first meeting to which Germany and Soviet Russia were invited to

participate as equals and whose agenda offered relief, reconstruction, and peace to Central and Eastern Europe. This offered Rathenau the great occasion of his life: the chance to represent Germany as a full partner of the West in the negotiations with Lenin's Russia.²⁰

European leaders had a mixed response to Rathenau's appointment. If British leaders hoped that Rathenau would "take even more courageous steps than before," the French feared that dialogues with the "clever" new foreign minister "would be interminable and lead nowhere." While the Belgians regarded him as a war criminal, responsible for the exploitation, deportations, and destruction of occupied countries during the war, the Italians were fascinated by Rathenau's exotic personality. And although the press seventy years ago was far more reticent over private matters than today, foreign journalists interpreted Rathenau's bachelorhood and solitary existence as testimony to his dedicated commitment to public service.²¹

Rathenau's political position was obviously delicate. He had to speak hard truths to his countrymen: Germany could not refuse to negotiate with its former enemies over reparations and it could not deny its liability. He also had to convince the Allies that their demands on Germany were economically, financially, and politically *unfulfillable*. He thus had to pursue highly intricate maneuvering among Britain, France, the United States, and Soviet Russia in the face of the unremitting opposition of hardline German nationalists. The August 1921 assassination of Matthias Erzberger—with whom Rathenau had devised this complex "fulfillment policy"—provided ample warning to his successor.²²

Walther Rathenau, the ex-monarchist, the Jewish captain of industry with his spiritualist and socialist leanings, the amateur politician/statesman without a seat in the Reichstag, stood isolated in republican Germany. His support from the "good Germans," the "Weimar Germans," was noticeably tepid. The Democrats, the Center, and the Moderate Socialists kept their distance. Chancellor Wirth, who expected to control foreign policy, evidently intended to make Rathenau his court Jew, one who was acceptable to British and Dutch bankers and tolerated by the French and who sent a useful mixed signal to Moscow.²³

Rathenau had powerful enemies among the Potsdamers, the monarchists, and the new right. In the *Wilhelmstrasse* he faced snobbish career diplomats who disliked his every move.²⁴ In the Reichstag, the brilliant, hawkish German People's Party (DVP) leader, Gustav Stresemann, who chaired the Foreign Affairs Committee resented having been blocked from the *Wilhelmstrasse*. Hugo Stinnes, the right-wing industrialist, gave Rathenau a useful bogeyman for his diplomatic negotiations with the Allies; but at home Stinnes undermined Rathenau by attacking the foreign minister's patriotic credentials. The anti-Semitic press termed Rathenau's appointment the triumph of Jewish banking interests, Jewish socialism, and Jewish freemasonry as well as of the international, liberal banking conspiracy led by Lloyd George which aimed to dominate a prostrate Christian Germany. "My heart is heavy," he wrote to his friend, Lili Deutsch. "A man alone—knowing his limits and weaknesses—what can a man like

that do in this paralyzed world with enemies all around?"²⁵ A lonely court Jew in a pan-German milieu, Rathenau seemed destined to sacrifice himself.

On the eve of the Genoa Conference the foreign minister met for five hours with Albert Einstein and Kurt Blumenfeld to discuss Palestine, the Jewish problem, and his role as Germany's advocate before the entire world. Rathenau insisted on his right to speak for the entire German people just as Disraeli had represented England. But there were key differences. The baptized Disraeli was a more facile and clever actor; by enlarging the island kingdom's riches with the Suez Canal, by making Victoria the Empress of India, *and* by expanding British democracy, he had enhanced the pride and prestige of both his peoples. On the other hand, the aristocratic, unbaptized Rathenau, who was about to plead for a defeated, and largely unrepentant Germany, risked disappointment and danger for Germans, for Jews, and for himself. Late in the night Rathenau admitted to Einstein and Blumenfeld that he served a Germany which had never accepted him completely or unconditionally. After bidding the foreign minister farewell, the two Zionists walked the late night streets of Berlin vindicated, and frightened.²⁶

And indeed there was an unpleasant, if not unexpected surprise at the Genoa Conference: a stellar, 34-nation summit gathering, the largest European international conference until Helsinki in 1975.²⁷ After a brilliant opening, when Germany was welcomed virtually as an equal, Rathenau found himself excluded from the secret Allied-Russian negotiations. And so on Easter Sunday, April 16, 1922, he traveled the road to Rapallo and signed the notorious separate treaty with Soviet Russia. Overnight, the Rathenau esteemed abroad was transformed into another ruthless German, who had ruptured western solidarity and signed with the barbaric Soviets. The would-be good European became the cunning Jew with his "underhanded tricks."²⁸

His fulfillment policy in shambles, Rathenau's days in office appeared to be numbered, and his very life at stake. Indeed, there had been a four-year wave of murders in republican Germany, mainly of Jews and left-wing figures. Rathenau understood that by assuming the high post of foreign minister he too would be a target of assassins. Since January 1922 German students had chanted: "Strike down Walther Rathenau/The God-damned Jewish sow!" Warned of an actual death threat by Chancellor Wirth, Rathenau had refused to retain a bodyguard.²⁹

The actual murder reads like a powerful work of fiction. The plot began in April 1922 when a group of young men formed a conspiracy to kill Rathenau, claiming he was one of the 300 Elders of Zion committed to taking over the world. The night before Rathenau was killed, he was bitterly attacked in the Reichstag by the demagogic Nationalist deputy, Karl Helfferich, who charged: "The Calvary of fulfillment . . . has ruined Germany, crushed our middle class, dragged countless persons into the depths of poverty and others into despair and suicide." Visibly shaken, Rathenau dined that night at the American Embassy and then stayed up until 4 A.M. earnestly conferring with his rival Hugo Stinnes about reparations.³⁰

The next morning at 10:45, Rathenau set out to work later than usual. About a mile and a half from his villa in Grunewald his open car was overtaken and stopped by an automobile with three handsome young men in spanking new leather jackets. When Rathenau's car was halted, one man shot the foreign minister with a submachine gun, while the second threw a hand grenade whose explosion lifted the victim from his seat; the driver of the assassins' vehicle then sped away. Rathenau had been shot five times; his jaw and backbone were completely shattered. He died almost at once. He was fifty-four years old.³¹

Not since the assassination of Abraham Lincoln did a nation make such a lavish display of mourning. The funeral service was held in the Reichstag with an oration delivered by the president of the Republic. The funeral cortege with an honor guard and the rolling of drums passed under the Brandenburg Gate on the way to the Rathenau family grave. Almost a half-million Berliners witnessed the solemn procession. The trade unions declared a day of mourning, and 200,000 workers assembled before the castle in Berlin; there were also workers' parades in Hamburg, Munich, Chemnitz, Eberfeld, Essen, and Breslau.³² World leaders responded with an outpouring of sympathy for the fallen leader.³³

Behind the public facade were less auspicious responses to Rathenau's murder. According to Stefan Zweig, "panic broke out" among the noisy vacationers bathing that June weekend on the North Sea. The pacifist Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, who was on a speaking trip in Germany, warned that he too was on a "list," fled terrified back to Switzerland and never returned to Germany. On the streets of Berlin, the bourgeoisie decried the impact on the dollar-exchange. Because June 24 was the saint's day of John the Baptist—one of the protectors of Prussian knighthood—and because on the day after a huge monarchist rally took place in Potsdam, rumors raced through Berlin's working-class districts of an impending St. Bartholomew's night. The cinema director Fritz Lang claimed that he created his schizophrenic supercriminal Dr. Mabuse as a response to the senseless violence attached to Rathenau's murder.³⁴

Privately, there was little sympathy for the victim. On the day after the murder, Friedrich Meinecke's fellow academics in Berlin raged over the communist menace to Germany. In Munich, Thomas Mann heard an eminent professor rejoice in "one less Jew!"³⁵ In Heidelberg, the Nobel prize-winning physics professor, Philip Lenard forbade his students to observe the day of Rathenau's burial and be "idle on account of a dead Jew." On his walks through the German capital, the Prague journalist Egon Erwin Kisch heard lawyers and government functionaries—still sporting their Wilhelminian mustaches—utter melodramatically "It's been done!"³⁶ And Kurt Tucholsky's newly invented vulgarian "Herr Wendrin" parodied the exasperation of solid German and Jewish businessmen with all the red flags, and the marching, and the huge and noisy lower-class demonstrations in Rathenau's name: Too much disorder over one pushy dead Jew!³⁷

Partisans of the Weimar Republic hoped that Rathenau's tragic death would represent a "defining moment" and produce a *ralliement* to the threat-

ened regime. The liberal cosmopolitan Count Harry Kessler wrote in his diary, "A new day of German history begins, or at least should begin."³⁸ Thomas Mann, a former ardent nationalist and monarchist, took his stand, uttering his incontrovertible "Yes" to the republic.³⁹ Rathenau's archrival Stresemann, obviously next in line to head the *Wilhelmstrasse*, moved to distance himself from his rightist past and support the Weimar Republic.⁴⁰

The Left saw Rathenau's murder as a signal for increased militancy against Wirth's feeble leadership. On a signal from Moscow, communist leader Clara Zetkin called for a popular front against the enemies of the republic; and both Julius Leber and Paul Levi called for loyalty *and* toughness against Weimar's assassins.⁴¹ In his poem, "Rathenau," Kurt Tucholsky taunted: "Four years of murder: By God enough!" and demanded "old mother parliament" pound its fist, dismiss the monarchist judges and disband secret groups, tame Ludendorff and contain the Reichswehr—"fight or die."⁴²

But the political clarification sought by Kessler, and by Tucholsky, did not materialize. The timid Wirth pushed through a draconian "law for the protection of the republic" which neither tamed the right nor strengthened the center. He refused to call new elections or broaden his government. If no right- or left-wing putsch occurred after Rathenau's murder, neither Wirth nor any other Weimar leader seized the moment of his death to steer Germany away from the nationalist hatred and class cleavages which would ultimately destroy the republic.⁴³ But this was beyond Rathenau's capacity as well.

The patrician Rathenau would not have been capable of achieving what another outsider, Willy Brandt, accomplished a half century later with his stunning combination of idealism and pragmatism, fineness and toughness—to steer an albeit smaller, stronger, better-protected and reined-in West Germany through its perilous moments of violence and economic convulsions while also protecting its fledgling democracy. After his enforced retirement Willy Brandt linked his ideas and values with those of Rathenau, "whose murder provided an early foretaste of the first republic's tragic fate." Brandt paid tribute to Rathenau's "undoubtedly upper middle class but liberal cast of mind [which] forged a path to democracy and social responsibility" as well as a "harmonious compromise between Germany's politics towards West and East."⁴⁴

Walther Rathenau's assassination did have this repercussion: it greatly intensified the witches' sabbath of German inflation, which actually began in 1914, speeded-up in 1920, and soared in 1922. The mark reached 401 to the dollar on July 1 and 1700 by the end of August; by then, a newspaper which cost 50,000 marks in the morning became a hundred thousand in the evening; people with things, with foreign currency, and with the ability to borrow made huge profits; salaried workers, the unemployed, savers, and retirees became impoverished. The inflation brought Germany a "madness of gigantic proportions," a profound destruction of values which had already been shattered by war and revolution; it exacerbated resentment and hatred—against rich foreigners and against the Jews.⁴⁵ Those who were responsible for the chaos—for the violence,

and for the irresponsible economic and political policies—did not fear the chaos, and the damage to the republic, from which they would ultimately profit.

Walther Rathenau's murder also brought no relief from the Allies' reparations demands. When the shaky Wirth government was replaced by the unpolitical, but equally obstinate, Cuno cabinet, the German Republic moved rapidly towards default. With the United States calling in their loans, the Allies in January 1923 were forced to invade the Ruhr to collect coal instead of cash. Then followed eight violent months of civil strife and hyperinflation, of communist uprisings and the first abortive Nazi putsch in November 1923. When the nadir had been reached, Stresemann, with U.S. help, negotiated the Dawes Plan with Germany's former enemies.⁴⁶ Rathenau had anticipated this solution in 1922, but he did not live to achieve it.

The short "golden twenties" of the Dawes Plan years lasted only until the stock market crash of 1929. In the 1930 parliamentary elections, the Nationalist-Nazi bloc that had eulogized Rathenau's murderers emerged triumphant. After the Weimar Republic collapsed two and a half years later, the Third Reich initiated the celebration of the day of Rathenau's murder.

In what sense was Walther Rathenau's assassination a prophetic event, an anticipation even of the Holocaust?

The virulent anti-Semitism of Imperial Germany—its exclusion and its scapegoating of the Jews—did not abate when the regime collapsed in 1918. Indeed defeat and revolution, the Kapp Putsch and the repeated reparations crises filled the anti-Semitic arsenal. The Right blamed every mistake of the Weimar government, every setback in the economy or in foreign affairs, on the Jews.⁴⁷

Rathenau was the ideal embodiment of the Jew as a dominating and destructive figure. A racist pamphlet in January 1922 accused Wirth of delivering Germany over to "Jewish world control" and termed Rathenau's nomination "a bald provocation of the German people." The Nazi organ, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, headlined one of its articles: "The resurrected Marx: Rathenau." The harassed Wirth government did not refute the attacks. Indeed, when the Right complained over the "disproportionate" number of Jews in Germany's delegation, it excluded one very talented non-Aryan from the Genoa Conference.⁴⁸

To be sure the climate of opinion in the German Republic was not all that uniform; not all Germans reduced their thinking to this level of stereotype or sought the reduction of "Jewish power," at least not in 1922. But during Rathenau's brief, but eventful tenure, as the Republic's political and economic fortunes seemed to speed out of control, many Germans became frightened for themselves and their future. And for many of them, the lone and exotic Walther Rathenau represented a convenient scapegoat for everything that had gone wrong for Germany: reparations and unemployment; inflation and high prices; arrogant Frenchies and menacing bolshies. The world-turned-upside-

down was represented by the fact that a vain, intellectual, cosmopolitan, left-leaning Jewish millionaire—especially one who resembled Lenin—was on top.⁴⁹

Consequently, many contemporary observers, Jewish and non-Jewish, were convinced of the heightened danger exposed by Rathenau's murder. The Austrian-Jewish economist, Gustav Stolper, lamented the "anti-Semitic plague" that had attacked the German body politic;⁵⁰ and the playwright Carl Zuckmayer insisted: "He was murdered because he was a Jew."⁵¹ The London *Jewish Chronicle* reminded its readers that Rathenau had been "persecuted" since his appointment (June 30). *The Nation*, which termed Rathenau "one of the few statesmen whom Europe could not afford to lose" (July 5), also called him the victim of the Henry Fords who had preached against a "global Jewish conspiracy" (July 12). In August, *The Contemporary Review* called Rathenau a sacrifice to the "new anti-Semitism" wielding its new lethal weapons to exclude the Jews. The German-Jewish writer, Emil Ludwig, called Rathenau's "urge towards power" a fatal impulse in a land which had never permitted a Jew to hold the reins of State or had forgiven one who cherished that aspiration.⁵² The Danish-Jewish literary critic, Georg Brandes, pinpointed the uniqueness of German anti-Semitism: in the Slavic lands there had been pogroms, mass killing, and mass plunder; while in the more "civilized" Reich single Jews were targeted for death.⁵³

In August 1922, a Thuringian farmer assured his American train-mate that Rathenau had been killed simply "because he was a Jew." The trial of Rathenau's murderers confirmed that two of his assassins were fanatic anti-Semites who believed that they were eliminating a "pernicious influence," an "international Jew" who aimed to introduce bolshevism into Germany. Visitors to Germany in the summer of 1922 remarked that "everything but the weather was blamed on the Jews."⁵⁴

Rathenau's death failed to kindle any spark of reconciliation between Germans and Jews. Brandes' caution about the peculiarity of German anti-Semitism remained valid. German Jewry, less than one percent of the population, more than ever feared to walk in Rathenau's footsteps and expose and endanger themselves. Walter Benjamin, in his anguished response to Rathenau's murder, wrote that the Jews could no longer hope to "speak" as Germans or even join the German "conversation."⁵⁵ And, just as important, the German people accepted, and in fact would expect, the Jews' almost total withdrawal from power. Walther Rathenau's great gamble—to join the opposites of Weimar and Potsdam and to stretch the German-Jewish relationship to its very extreme of acceptance—had been defeated.⁵⁶

The contrast with other states is instructive. French Jews had endured the Dreyfus Affair and American Jews the Leo Frank Affair as disturbing anomalies that did not diminish their sense of belonging to, or acceptance by, their homeland.⁵⁷ But for German Jews there was no redemption. After five decades of nonacceptance and vilification, they could not avoid concluding that the circumstances surrounding Rathenau's murder provided the verdict of their compatriots' "hate, delusion, and ingratitude."⁵⁸

Walther Rathenau was not the first victim of violence during the Weimar Republic; but this was the first time in German history that a Jew in a prominent position was killed largely *because* he was a Jew in a prominent position.⁵⁹ This fact was recognized by the small, militant Nazi party, which lauded the killers, boycotted the commemorations, and maligned the victim. And it was also acknowledged by German Jews, who perceived a stark limit on their prospects, their acceptance, and their survival. The reactions to the murder of Walther Rathenau foretold not only the destruction of the Weimar Republic but also the threat to the existence of the Jews of Germany and Europe.

NOTES

1. Einstein to Solovine, July 16, 1922, in Albert Einstein, *Lettres à Maurice Solovine* (Paris, 1956).
2. Letter to Max Brod, June 30, 1922, in Franz Kafka, *Briefe, 1902–1924* (Frankfurt am Main, 1975), p. 378.
3. "The Threat to the German Republic," *The Spectator*, July 1, 1922, p. 8.
4. See *Manchester Guardian*, June 26, 1922; *Social Demokraten* [Stockholm], June 27.
5. See the 455-page catalogue, with essays by an international group of nineteen historians: *Die Extreme berühren sich: Walther Rathenau, 1867–1922*, ed. Hans Wilderott (Berlin, 1993).
6. The most important biographies include: Peter Berglar, *Walther Rathenau: Ein Leben zwischen Philosophie und Politik* (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne, 1987); David Felix, *Walther Rathenau and the Weimar Republic* (Baltimore and London, 1971); James Joll, "Walther Rathenau: Prophet Without a Cause," in *Intellectuals in Politics: Three Biographical Essays* (London, 1960), pp. 59–129; Harry Count Kessler, *Walther Rathenau: His Life and Work* (New York, 1930); Peter Loewenberg, "Walther Rathenau and German Society" (Ph.D. diss., University of California/Berkeley, 1966); and Ernst Schulin, *Walther Rathenau: Repräsentant, Kritiker und Opfer seiner Zeit* (Göttingen, 1979); as well as Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, ed., *Walther Rathenau: Industrialist, Banker, Intellectual and Politician. Notes and Diaries, 1907–1922* (Oxford, 1988).
- Rathenau's private papers, which disappeared during World War II, were recently discovered in the former Special Government Archive in Russia: See Ernst Schulin, "Rathenau in Moskau," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Sept. 29, 1992.
7. See Manfred Pohl, *Emil Rathenau und die AEG* (Mainz, 1988); Ursula Mader, *Walther Rathenau als Funktionär des Finanzkapitals. Beiträge zu einer politische Biographie (1867–1917)* (Ph.D. diss., [East] Berlin, 1974); Peter Strunk, "Die Karriere Walther Rathenaus in der AEG," in *Die Extreme berühren sich*, pp. 45–54.
8. Thomas P. Hughes, ed., *Ein Mann vieler Eigenschaften: Walther Rathenau und die Kultur der Moderne* (Berlin 1990); Hubert W. Kran, *Die sozial- und gesellschaftspolitischen Vorstellungen Walther Rathenaus* (Bochum, 1975); James Joll, "Walther Rathenau -Intellectual or Industrialist?" in Volker Berghahn and Martin Kitchen, eds., *Germany in the Age of Total War* (London, 1981), pp. 46–62.
9. "Höre Israel!" [written under the pseudonym W. Hartenau], *Die Zukunft* 18 (1897): 454–62.
10. Rudolf Kallner, *Herzl und Rathenau: Wege jüdischer Existenz an der Wende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1976).
11. Walther Rathenau, "Staat und Judentum: eine Polemik," *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I (Berlin, 1918); also "Der Kaiser," *ibid.*, Vol. 6 (Berlin, 1929).
12. Ernst Schulin, "Walther Rathenau und sein Integrationsversuch als 'Deutscher jüdischer Stammes,'" in Walter Grab, ed., *Jüdische Integration und Identität in Deutschland, 1848–1918* (Tel Aviv, 1984), pp. 13–38; Clemens Picht, "Er will der Messias der Juden werden: Walther Rathenau zwischen Antisemitismus und jüdischer Prophetie," in *Die Extreme berühren sich*, pp. 117–28.

13. Lothar Burchardt, "Walther Rathenau und die Anfänge der deutschen Rohstoffbewirtschaftung im Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Tradition: Zeitschrift für Firmengeschichte und Unternehmerbiographie* 15 (1970): 169–96; Gerhard Hecker, *Walther Rathenau und sein Verhältnis zu Militär und Krieg* (Boppard, 1983).
14. Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, Vol. 2: 1918–1938 (Heidelberg, 1973), pp. 299–301.
15. Wilhelm Herzog, *Menschen, denen ich begegnete* (Bern and Munich, 1959), pp. 23–24.
16. Rathenau's "distinguished ambiguity," as depicted in the grandiose/impotent character of Paul Arnheim in Robert Musil's novel, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, included his uncertain sexuality: Alfred Kerr, *Walther Rathenau: Erinnerungen eines Freundes* (Amsterdam, 1935). He maintained an intimate, if chaste, lifelong relationship with his colleague's wife, Lili Deutsch as well as an apparently passionate tie ("eng befreundet") with a racist writer and publisher, Wilhelm Schwaner (1863–1944): Martin Buber to Franz Rosenzweig, July 5, 1926, in Buber, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 2, pp. 264–65.
17. Kessler, *Rathenau*, p. 272. See also Pierre Giraud, "L'image de Walther Rathenau dans la presse et la littérature allemandes" (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris (Sorbonne), 1975).
18. Detailed in Felix, *Rathenau*, pp. 41–104.
19. Hans von Raumer, "Walther Rathenau," *Deutsche Rundschau* 78 (July 1952): 664–69.
20. Carole Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921–1922*. New paperback ed. (Syracuse, 1993).
21. *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, Feb. 1; *Le Gaullois*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Temps*, *L'Oeuvre*, *Le Petit Journal*, Feb. 1, 1922; *L'Indépendance Belge*, Feb. 3, *La Métropole*, Feb. 4; *Tribuna*, Feb. 3.
22. Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy* (Princeton, 1959). In *Echo de Paris*, June 25, 1922, Louis Loucheur revealed Rathenau's premonition that he would be the next target of assassins.
23. Ernst Laubach, *Die Politik der Kabinette Wirth, 1921/22* (Lübeck and Hamburg, 1968); also Selma Stern-Täubler, *The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of Absolutism in Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1984).
24. Herbert von Dirksen, *Moscow, Tokyo, London: Twenty Years of German Foreign Policy* (Norman, Okla., 1952), pp. 29–32 aptly summarizes the condescending view.
On his personnel form for the foreign ministry, Rathenau gave his citizenship as "Prussian," acknowledged his untraditional bachelorhood, and left item #5, "Konfession," blank, later adding in pencil "Diese Frage entspricht nicht der Verfassung." Facsimile in *Die Extreme berühren sich*, p. 200.
25. Quoted in Kessler, *Rathenau*, p. 323.
26. Blumenfeld, *Erlebte Judenfrage*, pp. 142–45.
27. Details in Fink, *Genoa Conference*, pp. 143–280.
28. Jacques Bainville, "Le coup de théâtre de Gênes; L.L.B., 'L'accord de Rapallo,'" and Léon Daudet, "L'entrée en scène de M. Rathenau," all in *Action Française*, April 18, 1922.
29. Viscount Edward Vincent D'Abernon, *The Diary of an Ambassador: Versailles to Rapallo, 1920–1922* (New York, 1929), p. 323.
The German text of the ditty was: "Knallt ab den Walther Rathenau/Die gottverdammte Judensau": "Judensau" was one of the most ancient German terms for vilifying the Jews.
30. See report by U.S. Ambassador Houghton to Secretary of State Hughes, June 25, 1922, U.S. National Archives, Microfilmed Records of the State Department, M336, Reel 18.
31. A complete account of the murder in Martin Sabrow, "Märtyrer der Republik: Zu den Hintergründen des Mordanschlags vom 24. Juni 1922," in *Die Extreme berühren sich*, pp. 221–36.
32. See reports by Addison to Balfour, June 26, 1922, British Foreign Office Records (FO 371)/7536 and U.S. Consul in Breslau to Hughes, June 28, 1922, Microfilmed Records of the US State Dept., M336, Reel 18;.
33. Carole Fink, "Ausländische Reaktionen auf den Mord an Walther Rathenau," in *Die Extreme berühren sich*, pp. 237–246.
34. Paul M. Jensen, *The Cinema of Fritz Lang* (New York, 1969), pp. 79–94; also Oscar Loerke, *Tagebücher, 1903–1939* (Heidelberg, 1955), pp. 91–92 for the tense atmosphere after the murder.

35. Recalled in letter to Arthur Hübscher, June 27, 1928, in Thomas Mann, *Briefe, 1889–1936* (Berlin, 1961).
36. Egon Erwin Kisch, *Läuse auf dem Markt: Vermischte Prose*, Vol. 10 (1985), p. 316.
37. Kaspar Hauser [Kurt Tucholsky], "Herr Wendriner telefoniert," *Die Weltbühne*, 18, no. 27 (July 6, 1922), p. 19.
38. Harry Graf Kessler, *Tagebücher, 1918–1937* (Frankfurt am Main, 1961), pp. 323–24.
39. "Geist und Wesen der deutschen Republik. Dem Gedächtnis Walther Rathenau," in Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 11, (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), pp. 853–60.
40. Gustav Stresemann, *Vermächtnis*, ed. Henry Bernhard, Vol. I (Berlin 1932), pp. 21–22; cf. Henry A. Turner, *Stresemann and the Politics of the Weimar Republic* (Princeton, 1963). Historians still contest the extent of Stresemann's "conversion" but not his shock at Rathenau's murder.
41. Clara Zetkin, "Die proletarische Einheitsfront" (Aug. 1922) in *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. 2 (1918–1923) (Berlin [East], 1960), pp. 578–96; Paul Levi, *Zwischen Spartakus und Sozialdemokratie: Schriften, Aufsätze, Reden und Briefe* (Frankfurt, 1969), pp. 233–243; Julius Leber, *Schriften, Reden, Briefe* (Munich, 1976), pp. 33–35.
42. "Rathenau," in Kurt Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 3 (1921–1924) (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1975).
43. Stefan Zweig, "Zum Andenken Walther Rathenau. Am Jahrestag seiner Ermordung, 24 Juni 1922," *Neue Freie Presse* (June 24, 1923); Georg Bernhard, *Die deutsche Tragödie: Der Selbstmord einer Republik* (Prague, 1933), pp. 150–60.
44. Willy Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960–1975* (Boston, 1976), p. 151.
45. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (New York, 1943), pp. 310–12.
46. Stephen A. Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe: The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan* (Chapel Hill, 1976).
47. Gustav Mayer, *Erinnerungen* (Vienna, 1949), p. 332.
48. Moritz Schlesinger, *Erinnerungen eines Aussenseiters im diplomatischen Dienst* (Cologne, 1977), p. 298.
49. There are intriguing parallels with other brilliant, solitary, and similarly vilified Jewish statesmen: Judah Benjamin, Leon Trotsky, Léon Blum, Maxim Litvinov, and even Henry Kissinger.
50. Toni Stolper, *Ein Leben in Brennpunkten unserer Zeit: Wien, Berlin, New York: Gustav Stolper, 1888–1947* (Tübingen, 1960), p. 158.
51. Carl Zuckmayer, *Als wär's ein Stück von mir* (Vienna, 1967), p. 309.
52. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 27, 1922.
53. *Politiken*, June 28, 1922.
54. Lowenthal, "Behind Rathenau," *Menorah Journal* (June 1923): 72–81.
55. Walter Benjamin to Florens Christian Rang, Nov. 18, 1923, in *Briefe 1* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), pp. 309–13.
56. Arnold Brecht, *Aus Nächster Nahe: Lebenserinnerungen*. (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 351–52. Cf. Fritz Stern, "'Ich wünschte der Wagen möchte zerschellen.' Zerissen wie das eigene Volk: Walther Rathenau als Unternehmer, Intellektueller und Staatsmann," *Die Zeit* 43, no. 49 (Dec. 2, 1988).
57. See Albert S. Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank, 1894–1915)* (Cambridge, 1991).
58. Albert Einstein, "In Memoriam Walther Rathenau," *Neue Rundschau* 33, no. 8 (1922): 815–16. "I regretted that he became a Minister. Given the stance of most educated Germans against the Jews, I was convinced that the Jews' most natural reaction was to maintain a splendid isolation from the public arena. But I did not imagine that the hate, delusion, and ingratitude had extended so far. May I applaud those responsible for the ethical training of the German people for the past fifty years: By your fruits so shall you be known."
59. That Rathenau continues to be a lightning rod for racism is witnessed by the desecration of his grave during the wave of anti-Semitic and anti-foreign violence in Germany in 1993.

The Jews of Europe and the Moment of Death in Medieval and Modern Times

ELLIOTT HOROWITZ

WHEN, IN EARLY 1556, ABRAHAM COLONIA, A WEALTHY Italian Jew, died suddenly in the town of Viadana, one of the local rabbinic authorities ruled that his body should not be accompanied to burial since he did not confess publicly, and was therefore “akin to one who has no place in the next world.” There were others who argued, however, that there was deliverance for his soul, for his lips were seen to move silently in the final moments before his death.¹ This stress upon deathbed confession as a publicly witnessed ritual was no isolated instance, but rather a common feature of Jewish death in the Italian communities of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Ferrara’s *Gemilut Hasadim* confraternity, the first of its kind to be founded in Italy, began in 1552 to require its officials, when visiting a member who had been seriously ill for three days “to encourage him to confess his sins before God and to deliver his final testament before his family.”²

Similarly, the *Gemilut Hasadim* society of Verona instructed its officers in 1575 that when going to call on someone after three days of illness they must “bring with them a rabbi and arrange for him [the sick person] to confess.”³ The presence of a rabbi was not necessarily externally imposed, nor was it reserved exclusively for males. When Leon Modena’s young fiancée was dying in Venice in 1590 she requested, as he tells us in his autobiography, “that a sage be summoned so that she could make confession.” When Modena’s own death came near, several decades later—at a time when he himself was serving as a member of the Venetian rabbinate—he recited the confessional prayer, according to his own testimony “in the presence of ten men, three of whom were rabbis.”⁴

The custom of reciting deathbed confession before a quorum of ten had been mentioned in prayer books of the Roman (that is, Italian) rite and other liturgical compilations published in Venice since the late sixteenth century,⁵ and Modena’s adherence to this custom is therefore hardly surprising. Yet one cannot help noticing that the presence of one or more rabbis *and* a *minyan* of ten transformed the deathbed into a kind of miniature synagogue where an essentially public rather than private ritual was taking place. Although this

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was the way in which Modena himself chose to leave the world, he understood that there were others who preferred greater privacy. In his work on Jewish rites and customs known as the *Riti*, the first such work written by a Jew for a non-Jewish audience, Modena wrote: “When any thinketh he shall die, he then desireth that ten or more persons be called unto him; among which there is to be one Rabbine, yet sometimes they do not desire to have so great a company called. . . .”⁶

Although some understandably preferred to confess their sins in private, a preference perhaps rooted in the growing recognition during the Renaissance of the distinction between public and private domains, the custom of confessing before a quorum of ten continued in Italy under the most challenging circumstances. An eyewitness account of the great plague of 1630 as experienced by Padua’s Jewish community reports that its chief rabbi, Solomon Marini, “seeing that the plague had gained force and many were dying without confession, instructed the people that when anyone felt he had contracted the plague, before confining himself to his bed he should stand outside his door, and in the presence of ten men who shall stand near, he should confess his sins. . . .”⁷ The rabbi himself demonstrated this before the members of his community, even though he himself had not yet contracted the plague. In seventeenth-century Italy it was not only such kabbalists as R. Aaron Berechia of Modena (Leon’s cousin, and author of the classic Jewish handbook on matters of death) who felt strongly that a proper Jewish death required public confession before a quorum of ten.⁸ This was, rather, a widely shared sentiment to which R. Aaron Berechia simply provided, as in other instances, a kabbalistic gloss.

Earlier generations had not been quite as certain that a Jew’s deathbed confession needed to be an elaborate or public ritual, or that outside intervention was necessary in order to insure that he died in some prescribed manner. Indeed, there was no officially prescribed manner before the late middle ages, and possibly not until early modern times. Rather, as Philip Ariès has observed concerning the traditional culture of medieval Europe, death was perceived as “a ritual organized by the dying person himself, who presided over it and knew its protocol.”⁹ The protocol was learned primarily through observation, for no attempt was made to codify the Jewish manner of death until the thirteenth century, and only in the seventeenth was this done comprehensively. In what follows I sketch the outlines of this process.

The Talmud itself seems to know only a very simple deathbed rite. In Tractate *Shabbat* (32a) we read “Our Rabbis taught: If one falls sick and inclines toward death, he is told, ‘make confession,’ for all who are sentenced to death make confession.” The phrase “he is told” is somewhat cryptic, since it is not made clear who is doing the telling. Rashi (d. 1105) glosses that this is done by “those present,” but this too fails to specify whether they merely happen to be present or whether they came especially in order to attend the deathbed. What his gloss seems to exclude is the notion of rabbinic or communal authority being enlisted specifically for this purpose.

Like the Talmud itself, Rashi also fails to specify what sort of confession should be recited—general or specific, long or short, private or public. A clear tradition concerning this matter had evidently not yet emerged in the Ashkenazic world of his time. In late medieval Spain, by contrast, R. Yom Tov b. Abraham Ishbili (Ritba, d.c. 1330), when commenting upon the same Talmudic passage, saw fit to add: “And the order of confession is to be found in the *Torat ha-Adam* of our late great rabbi.”¹⁰ The great rabbi to whom he referred was his late fellow Spaniard R. Moses b. Nahman (Nahmanides, d. 1270), who in his *Torat ha-Adam* had provided the first comprehensive discussion of death and mourning in medieval Jewish literature. It is worth noting that in referring exclusively to Nahmanides, Ritba skipped over the confessional formula of another great rabbi who had been even more respected in Spain and throughout the Jewish world—Maimonides. The latter had presented such a formula in the opening paragraph of his Laws of Repentance: “How does one confess? The penitent says ‘I beseech thee, O Lord, I have sinned, I have done wrong. I have transgressed before thee, and have done thus and thus, and lo I repent and am ashamed of my deeds and I will never do this again.’” Furthermore, Maimonides added that “the fuller and more detailed the confession one makes, the more praiseworthy is he.”¹¹

There was one problem with Maimonides, however. He did not include the dying in his list of those who should recite confession, and this glaring omission was noted by at least one of his commentators.¹² Maimonides apparently believed that the aforementioned Talmudic passage in *Shabbat* merely encouraged confession by the dying but did not actually require it. This position of Maimonides may help to explain why the late S. D. Goitein encountered only one instance of confession of sins in anticipation of death among the hundreds of thousands of medieval documents he examined from the Cairo Geniza.¹³

It is understandable, then, that Ritba preferred to skip over Maimonides and to cite, rather, in connection with the passage in *Shabbat*, the confessional prayer more recently presented by Nahmanides in his *Torat ha-Adam*, which the latter claimed to have received from “men of piety and good deeds.” That prayer, moreover, was twice the length of the Maimonidean confessional formula quoted above.¹⁴ Its impressive length and alleged pedigree, as well as the fact that it was intended specifically for the deathbed, allowed the confessional prayer of Nahmanides to enjoy considerable influence for several generations, both in Spain and beyond it.¹⁵ The Provençal scholar, R. Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel quoted the confession of Nahmanides in his early fourteenth-century work *Orhot Hayyim*, adding further that one could append to it the Yom Kippur confession, and that it was “desirable to enumerate one’s sins.”¹⁶ In his *Sefer Toledot Adam ve-Hava*, R. Yeroham b. Meshullam (d. c. 1350), a Provençal native who later migrated to Spain, also pursued a policy of expansion with regard to pre-death confession. Quantitatively, his text is four times the length of Nahmanides’, whose own confessional formula, we recall,

was twice the length of the one provided by Maimonides. Qualitatively it differs as well in that it includes, apparently for the first time, a confession of faith (based on the thirteen principles of Maimonides) in addition to the standard confession of sins.¹⁷ Like Nahmanides, R. Yeroham claimed that he had received his confessional text from “men of piety and good deeds” but they could hardly have been the same ones.¹⁸

Alongside the quantitative and qualitative expansion of the confessional prayer we encounter a good deal of ritual elaboration in R. Yeroham as well. Prior to this point it would have been difficult to describe a distinctly Jewish ritual of dying—in the fourteenth century such a ritual begins to take shape. R. Yeroham not only prescribes the washing of hands before the recitation of pre-death confession, but insists also that this be done with the ritual blessing. The dying Jew is also instructed to don his prayer shawl before reciting confession, thus heightening the ritual character of the act. These instructions would appear to reflect existing practices rather than ritual innovations on their author’s part. Neither the rabbi nor the quorum of ten mentioned in later sources is required by R. Yeroham, but it is clear that we are on the way to that degree of ritualization.¹⁹

The donning of the *tallith* before death in order to heighten its ritual character is evident also in the fourteenth century among Ashkenazic Jewry. In 1349, during the period of the Black Death, the Jews of Nordhausen were to be publicly executed on account of their alleged complicity in spreading the plague. According to a Hebrew account which has survived, they asked permission of the local townsmen to prepare themselves for what they considered to be their martyrdom, and as part of their preparation the men donned their prayer shawls and burial shrouds “with joy.”²⁰ From later in the fourteenth century we have the detailed account written by Jacob Sarfati of Avignon of his daughter’s death by plague in 1383. Esther, who was married and twenty years old at the time, did not of course don a prayer shawl, but she did request to wash her hands before beginning to recite her confession. It is clear that by this time the notion of dying a beautiful death had begun to emerge among the Jews of Mediterranean Europe, for Jacob writes of his daughter that “even if she had no testimony on her behalf other than the movement of her lips and the pleasantness of her voice and loveliness of her speech as she prepared for her death, these would be sufficient grounds for showering her with praise.”²¹ Significant as well is the very fact of his decision to record this beautiful death for the benefit of later generations, a death carefully orchestrated by the young woman who was clearly in control until her final moments.

Sarfati’s moving account deserves more detailed analysis than can be pursued here. I shall address myself only to the ritual aspects of Esther’s death as lovingly recorded by her father. In addition to washing her hands and conscientiously reciting her confession, Esther made a point of taking leave of the members of her extended family, male as well as female, by means of a kiss.

She began with her father, from whom she requested a blessing, and continued down the line, but she warned her husband not to touch her on account of her menstrual impurity ("for the way of women is upon me"). She also had the presence of mind to warn one of her relatives, who was a *kohen*, to leave the room before the others, lest he be caught by surprise under the same roof as a corpse. Sarfati remarks, in conclusion, upon the force and yet sweetness of her final kisses, her last recorded activity, so that she died, in his words "with a kiss."²² This, of course, was according to Jewish tradition the most desirable form of death, the way in which Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were believed to have died "at the mouth of the Lord."²³

Significantly, however, no attempt was made by her father, even in this idealizing account, to suggest that she died in the way Rabbi Akiva had died—with the first verse of the *Shema* on his lips. By contrast, Leon Modena, early in the seventeenth century, wrote of his son Mordecai who "prayed and confessed profusely before his maker for more than two hours as he lay dying" that "psalms and confessions did not leave his lips until his soul departed with *ehad*."²⁴ Similarly, whereas Modena reported even of his adolescent fiancée that she called for a rabbi in order to recite her confession, Jacob Sarfati made no mention of a rabbi at his pious daughter's bedside. These two characteristic features of Jewish death in early modern times had not yet become widespread in the fourteenth century. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they had yet appeared at all.²⁵

Deathbed Confession and the Christian Environment

The absence of the rabbi from the deathbed during the earlier period is apparently related to the same factor that ultimately led to his (delayed) appearance there—the Christian environment. The adversary relationship of the Jew with Christianity during the High Middle Ages, so sensitively discussed by Jacob Katz among others, was sufficiently strong and close to the surface as to severely discourage adoption of any religious practices that even appeared imitative. When the thirteenth century *Book of the Pious* only grudgingly permits revealing to a single righteous and discreet man only a single sin so that he may offer penitential advice, it is clear that more is at work than the Talmudic tradition which regards it as impudent to reveal one's sins to others.²⁶ Rather, it would appear that the recognition of confession's potential utility, especially among the ranks of the pietists, is overcome by an instinctive recoil from such characteristically Christian religious practices.

Jewish sensitivity with regard to the issue of confession must have been especially great, since Jews were sometimes criticized by Christians for not having someone to whom they confessed their sins. This, in fact, became an issue in Jewish-Christian polemics. In the thirteenth-century *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, rather close in time and place to the *Book of the Pious* of German Hasidism, we encounter the following passage: "The heretics criticize us . . . for

not confessing the way they do, and they cite proof from the book of Proverbs [28:13]. This is how you should answer him: On the contrary, one should conceal one's sins from another man and not tell him 'this is how I have sinned' lest the listener be tempted to commit that sin. One should, rather, confess one's sins to God. . . ."²⁷

A similar critique of Christian confession may be found in R. Meir of Narbonne's polemical tract *Milhemet Mitzvah*, written before 1245, as well as in Joseph Official's somewhat earlier *Sefer Joseph ha-Mekane*, written in Northern France, and upon which the author of *Sefer Nizzahon* drew.²⁸ There, in response to being asked by a priest "to whom do you [Jews] confess?" the rabbi replies "to God," which elicits from the priest the question: "And do you not confess to your *hazzan*?"²⁹ Although R. Joseph found a suitable answer for the rabbi in his polemical treatise, there is no doubt, as the late H. H. Ben-Sasson noted, that the matter of confession raised a serious problem for Jewish scholars in Europe who both understood its value and yet were evidently repulsed by its Christian associations.³⁰ He cited the example of R. Menahem Meiri of Perpignan (d. 1316), who explained in the introduction to his treatise on repentance that he was moved to compose it after a discussion with a Christian scholar who found the Jews especially deficient in this area. "And also in the matter of confession," Meiri wrote, "they find pretexts against us, on account of our being a people whose sins are forgiven although they are kept covered."³¹ With these last words he echoed the verse in Psalms (32:1) which Official had earlier placed in the mouth of the rabbi replying to the priest's criticism of the Jews' failure to confess. The fact that confession before another individual became an issue of polemical debate between the Jews of Provence, Northern France, and Germany and their Christian neighbors could only have heightened their awareness of its Christian character. This, in turn, undoubtedly strengthened the barrier against Jewish acceptance of such a custom, whether at the deathbed or elsewhere, even if it emerged largely as the result of internal development.

One is struck, in reading the Jewish chronicles of martyrdom during the first crusade, of the absence in them of any reference to collective confession of sins on the part of Jews preparing for their deaths—either at their own hands or at the hands of those who sought to convert them to Christianity. The Jews of this period would undoubtedly have recoiled at the idea of performing a ritual suggesting Christian influence at precisely the moment at which they were sacrificing their lives in defiance of that religion. What does emerge, however, is the way in which they are portrayed as shouting the *Shema* in unison, thereby emphatically denying the Christian faith with their last breath.³² In fact, there is reason to suspect that the practice which later became standard of reciting the *Shema* immediately prior to death, even when dying quietly in bed, actually had its roots in the mass martyrdom of the Crusades, whether in the acts of Jewish martyrdom themselves, or in the ways in which they were later remembered and represented.

Martyrdom and the *Shema*

The famous Talmudic account of the death of R. Akiva, which has survived in several versions, merely reports that he happened to have been executed by the Romans at the time of day when it was obligatory to recite the *Shema*. There he is presented as using his last grains of strength to perform the last commandment available to him, rather than consciously choosing to die with the words of the *Shema* on his lips.³³ It is noteworthy, in fact, that the medieval liturgical poem, *Eleh Ezkerah* recited on Yom Kippur and dealing with the story of the “ten martyrs” (of which R. Akiva was one), passes over the detail of his reciting the *Shema* as if it were insignificant. Its author, known simply as Judah, lived in the Islamic East and died well before the Crusades.³⁴ By contrast, the thirteenth-century Ashkenazic poet Meir b. Yehiel, in his *Arzei ha-Levanon* dealing with the same theme, is careful to report in his depiction of R. Akiva’s martyrdom that “his soul departed with *ehad*.”³⁵ This shift in emphasis would seem to reflect the close identification of martyrdom with recitation of *Shema* in the post-crusade Ashkenazic mentality after the frequently retold instances of Jews heroically giving their lives while brazenly shouting its first verse.³⁶

In thirteenth-century Spain, too, the *Shema* came to be associated with martyrdom. This was done, however, in a far more spiritualized way which related less directly to historical events, for Spanish Jews had never experienced mass martyrdom on a scale comparable to those of Franco-Germany. In the *Zohar*, dating from the late thirteenth century, the view is expressed that anyone who, while reciting its first verse, directs his heart to be willing to undergo martyrdom “shall be considered as if he had given his life for the sanctification of God’s name.”³⁷ This view, which was apparently first expressed by R. Jonah Gerondi earlier in the thirteenth century,³⁸ came to enjoy enormous popularity among kabbalistically inspired Jewish authors, especially from the sixteenth century onward.³⁹ However, as R. Z. J. Werblowsky has observed in this context, “readiness to be killed, slaughtered, drowned, and burned if God imposes it is one thing, the eager desire for it is quite another.” Against this background there emerged what Jacob Katz has called the “spiritualization” of martyrdom, a process whereby the ideal of giving one’s life for the sanctification of God’s name ceased to be regarded as an actual historical possibility, but was given rather primarily symbolic and spiritual meaning.⁴⁰ Even if those spreading the notion that martyrdom could be performed through proper recitation of the *Shema* had no intention of displacing actual martyrdom as an ideal, this may nonetheless have been among its ultimate effects.

The act of sanctifying God’s name, according to classical Jewish law, was optimally performed in the presence of ten Jews.⁴¹ This would seem to explain further why from the late sixteenth century onward it became increasingly common, as we have seen, to gather ten to be present at the deathbed. By that time it had also become standard to recite the *Shema* with one’s final breath.⁴² It was during the sixteenth century also that the notion of spiritualized martyrdom

began to spread widely, identifying the readiness to sanctify God's name (while reciting the *Shema*) with its actual realization. The natural consequence of the intersection of these developments was that a Jew reciting the proper words and maintaining the proper thoughts while lying on his deathbed could consider himself, and be considered by others, as undergoing martyrdom for the sanctification of God's name. The line between a quiet death in bed and the violent death of a martyr could therefore be erased completely. The presence of ten Jewish males, moreover, could transform such a death not merely into martyrdom, but into the highest level thereof. For it was clear to all that the presence of ten enabled an act of martyrdom to become a public sanctification of the name of God which, in the formulation of Maimonides, gained entry for the dying man among the ranks of "Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues . . . the martyrs than whom none ranks higher."⁴³

Leon Modena, we recall, made a point of stressing that his son Mordecai expired, like R. Akiva, with the word "*ehad*" on his lips, even though he died as the result of alchemical experimentation rather than martyrdom. In later generations the recitation of the *Shema* by a dying person could be invested with a variety of meanings. Thus toward the end of the eighteenth century the famous Palestinian emissary R. Haim Azulai, while visiting France, told the story of how Modena himself, after denying the doctrine of *gilgul* or transmigration of souls, had come to believe in it after seeing a six-month-old infant recite the first verse of the *Shema* as he lay dying. It is not clear whether or not he was believed. Toward the end of the nineteenth century R. Isaac Tedeschi of Ancona (Italy) was informed of a local instance that had reportedly occurred during the days of Azulai himself. A Jewish convert to Christianity had been killed, and prior to his death had recited *Shema Yisrael* before witnesses with emotion and enthusiasm. Rabbi Azulai, who was then visiting, was reported to have ruled that he was to be mourned as a Jew.⁴⁴

Christians, however, sometimes chose to interpret such actions differently. One of them, Moses Margoliouth, wrote in 1843:

The unbelieving Jews are very fond of asserting that no Jew can become a real Christian, and therefore, that all converted Jews are necessarily impostors; and in proof of this assertion, they generally relate that they know of many converted Jews who, on their deathbed, exclaimed. . . . 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.' Of course, the assertion and proof owe to their ignorance of the New Testament. . . . They ought to remember, that the head cornerstone of the Christian Church is a Jew, and the injunction 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord,' is his teaching, as well as that of Moses; and it may properly be the dying words of every faithful Christian, not only Jewish but also Gentile.⁴⁵

Apparently enough converts had been reciting *Shema Yisrael* in order for nineteenth century Christianity, or at least its self-appointed spokesperson Moses Margoliouth, to attempt to co-opt the custom from Judaism.

Such attempts, however, did not weaken the force of tradition among the Jews of Europe, many of whom continued, through the Holocaust, to find

meaning in the recitation of the *Shema*, often collectively, before going to their deaths. I shall close by quoting from an anonymous memoir of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941, chosen almost at random. The author reports that when a number of Jews who had gathered to pray together saw eight of their co-religionists led out to the street for execution "We, the entire *minyán*, began to say the 'Shma Yisrael.' We could hear Jews screaming the same words on the street." After they were shot, our author continues "The same course of events repeated itself—again 'Shma Yisrael,' again 'Jews save us!' again two rounds of fire, and the seven bodies of the martyrs were again packed and nailed shut in caskets."⁴⁶ Unlike some earlier generations, however, those who chose under such circumstances to think of themselves as martyrs while reciting the *Shema* did not have to resort to much imagination.

NOTES

1. Responsa *Mattanot ba-Adam*, ed. Y. Bokstein (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1983), p. 393. For criticism of the deceased for not having confessed see also the somewhat later instance in Casale noted by B. A. Rivlin, *Mutual Responsibility in the Italian Ghetto: Holy Societies 1516–1789* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), p. 63. On pre-death confession see there also pp. 97–100, as well as Elliott Horowitz, "Jewish Confraternities in Seventeenth-Century Verona: A Study in the Social History of Piety," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1982), ch. 3.
2. Pinkas Hevrat Gemilut Hasadim, Ferrara, ms. Haifa University Ha 6, (microfilm Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, HM 5231) 7a (par. 20). On the confraternity's beginnings see David Ruderman, "The Founding of a 'Gemilut Hasadim' Society in Ferrara in 1515," *AJS Review* 1 (1976) : 233–68.
3. *Pinkas Hevrat Gemilut Hasadim, Verona*, ms. Jerusalem 4^o 560, 1b (par. 8).
4. *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, trans. and ed. M. R. Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 91, 165, 175.
5. See *Seder Tahanunim . . . Shomrim la-Boker Ashkenazim* (Venice, 1597), pt. II, 7a; *Mahzor ke-Minhag Benei Roma*, 2 vols., (Venice, 1626), II: 343b. An identical edition to the latter was apparently published in Venice in 1587. See Daniel Goldschmidt's edition of S. D. Luzzatto's *Mavo le-Mahzor Benei Roma* (Tel-Aviv, 1966), pp. 116–17. Robert Bonfil has recently claimed that the custom of gathering ten men at the bedside of the dying man "had become established during the Middle Ages," but he has not cited any source to this effect. See idem, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 273.
6. *Historia de' riti hebraici* (Venice, 1638), V: 7, par. 2. I have followed the translation of Edmund Childmead, *The History of the Rites . . . of the Present Jews* (London, 1650). For a more modern translation of the passage see now Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 266–267. On the move during the Renaissance toward separation of the private and public domains and its possible influence upon Jewish society in matters of death see *ibid*, pp. 271, 273, 284.
7. Abraham Catalano, *Olam Hafukh*, ed. C. Roth, *Kobez 'al Yad* 4 (14) (1946), p. 90.
8. See his *Ma'avar Yabok* (Mantua, 1626), introduction, and the section entitled *Sifte Zedek*, ch. 19.
9. Philip Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. P. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 11.
10. *Hiddushe ha-Ritba: Shabbat*, ed. S. Z. Reichman (New York, 1967), p. 144.
11. *Mishneh Torah*, "Teshuva" 1:1.
12. *Hagahot Maimoniot*, ad. loc.

13. A Jew living in Egypt who had been attacked by Tartars in northern Iraq reported afterwards in a letter of 1236 "I and those who were with me said the confession of sins, for we were sure to be killed." See S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 5, "The Individual" (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 66, 155.
14. *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, ed. C. D. Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), 2: 47.
15. See, for example, the sixteenth-century travel account of R. Moses Basola in *Mas'ot Eretz Yisrael*, ed. A. Ya'ari (Tel-Aviv, 1945), p. 137.
16. *Orhot Hayyim*, ed. M. Schlesinger (Berlin, 1901), v. 2 pp. 559, 634. The advice for enumeration, which Schlesinger found only in the manuscript of S. D. Luzzatto's he had examined, is confirmed by ms. Moscow-Guenzberg 107 [Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, no. 6787], which dates from the author's lifetime (1329). See also the parallel passage in the anonymous *Kol Bo* (New York: Shulsinger, 1946), par. 113.
17. *Sefer Toledot Adam ve-Hava* (Venice, 1553), 230a-b.
18. Contrast L. M. Landshut, *Seder Bikkur Holim* (Berlin, 1867), p. xxiv.
19. Eventually, the donning of phylacteries was to be introduced as well. See Menahem Navarra, *Yemei Temimim* (Venice, 1753), 12b.
20. A. Epstein, "Die Wormser Minhagbücher, Literarisches und Culturhistorisches aus denselben," in *Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an David Kaufmann*, ed. M. Brann and F. Rosenthal (Breslau, 1900), p. 298. See also B. Z. Dinur, *Yisrael ba-Gola II:2* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1966), p. 645. It is possible that the *tallith* was worn, like the shrouds, in preparation for burial rather than death, but the context suggests otherwise.
21. See David Kaufmann, "Le 'Grand-Deuil' de Jacob b. Salomon Sarfati d'Avignon," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 30 (1895), p. 58.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
23. See, for example, Baba Bathra 17a and Rashi on Numbers 20: 1, 33:38, Deut. 34:5. On this theme see now the rich discussion of Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 17-20, 24-28, 84-86.
24. *Zori la-Nefesh u-Marpeh la-'Ezem* (Venice, 1619), 5a.
25. For evidence from the late fifteenth century of Jewish pre-death confession before a fellow Jew see *Mahzor Minhag Roma* (Soncino and Casalmaggiore, 1485-6) vol. 2, pp. 305-6 and Elliott Horowitz, "Giotto in Avignon, Adler in London, Panofsky in Princeton: On the Odyssey of an Illustrated Hebrew Manuscript from Italy and on its Meaning," *Jewish Art* 19-20 (1993-4), pp. 105-7, as well as the other sources cited there.
26. *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. J. Wistinetzki (Berlin, 1924), no. 72, ed. R. Margoliot (Jerusalem, 1973), no. 21. For the Talmudic passage see *Berakhoth*, 34b.
27. I quote from the translation of David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), p. 223.
28. See Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, pp. 33, 339.
29. Joseph Official, *Sefer Joseph ha-Mekane*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 104-5. Note there also the claim of the author that his father R. Nathan had disputed the matter of confession with the pope.
30. H. H. Ben-Sasson, *On Jewish History in the Middle Ages* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1962), pp. 248-9.
31. *Hibbur ha-Teshuva*, ed. A. Sofer (Jerusalem, 1950), p. 2. Compare the will of R. Asher in Israel Abrahams, ed. *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1926), pp. 124-5, who also seems to have internalized the value of confession.
32. See A. Habermann, *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat* (2nd ed. Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 25, 33, 39, 49, 74-5, 78, 100. On the meaning of the *Shema* to these martyrs see Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 19, 88. The question of the historicity of the Hebrew crusade chronicles has been keenly debated in recent years. See most recently, for the more skeptical position, Jeremy Cohen, "The 'Persecutions of 1096'-From Martyrdom to Martyrology: The Sociocultural Context of the

Hebrew Crusade Chronicles" (Hebrew), *Zion* 59 (1994): 169–208, and the literature cited there pp. 170–71, n. 6.

33. See *Berakhot* 61b [Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, pp. 17–18] and the parallels cited in H. Albeck-Y. T. Zunz, *Ha-Derashot be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1947), pp. 312–13. The difference between R. Akiva's recitation of the *Shema* and that of the medieval martyrs was noted by Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, p. 88.

34. See Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mahazor la-Yamim ha-Noraim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1970) v. 2 p. 568ff; Ezra Fleischer, "Piyyut," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 13:587.

35. Daniel Goldschmidt, *Seder ha-Kinot le-Tish'a be-Av* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1968), pp. 12, 82ff.

36. On the identification of the martyrs of the crusades with R. Akiva and his colleagues see Haberman, *Gezerot*, p. 31. Whether or not the accounts are absolutely accurate (see above n. 32), for our purposes it is important to stress that these martyrs were remembered as having defiantly shouted the first verse of the *Shema* at the time of their deaths.

37. *Zohar* I: 124b, III: 195b; Dinur, *Yisrael ba-Gola* II: 5 p. 392. On the *Zohar's* view see also A. Shohat, "Martyrdom in the Thought of the Spanish Exiles and Safed Kabbalists" (Hebrew), in *Holy War and Martyrology* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel, 1967), pp. 142–145.

38. See his *Iggeret ha-Teshuva*, ed. B. Y. Silber (Benei Berak, 1968), p. 22, quoted by Joseph Hacker, "Was *Kiddush ha-Shem* Spiritualized in the Early Modern Period?," in I. M. Gafni and A. Ravitzky, eds., *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom: Studies in Memory of Amir Yekutiel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1992), p. 224. See there also (pp. 224–5) the similar view expressed by Gerondi's student R. Solomon ibn Adret (Rashba) in one of his responsa (5: 25).

39. See, for example, R. Eliezer Azikri, *Sefer Haredim* (Jerusalem, 1981) p. 60; Modena, *Ma'avar Yabok*, "Sifte Zedek" ch. 3. For other examples see Hacker, "Was *Kiddush ha-Shem* Spiritualized," pp. 226–228. For its use by Nathan of Gaza see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. Z. J. Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 271.

40. R. Z. J. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (2nd. ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), p. 152; Jacob Katz, "Martyrdom in the Middle Ages and in 1648–9" (Hebrew) in the *Y. Baer Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1960), especially pp. 322–27. For a recent critique of Katz's view see Hacker "Was *Kiddush ha-Shem* Spiritualized," esp. pp. 229–232. Hacker has argued that spiritualized performance of the act of martyrdom did not displace actual martyrdom, but rather, strengthened (or was intended to strengthen) the resolve to undergo actual martyrdom. Despite the sources he has marshaled it is nonetheless striking that the spiritualized version of martyrdom achieved during the recitation of the *Shema* first emerges in Spain, where it quickly achieved wider currency, and does not appear in the Ashkenazic world until the sixteenth century. On the connection between recitation of the *Shema* and spiritualized martyrdom, see also Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, pp. 74–77, 101–104.

41. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Yesodei ha-Torah" 5:4.

42. As the Marrano philosopher Isaac Cardoso (d. 1681) wrote, it is the first thing that the Jews teach their children "and it is with these words that Jews also die." Quoted from his *Philosophia libera*, by Y. H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 275. See also *ibid.* pp. 398, 460, and compare Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, p. 255, as well as Beth Zion Abrahams ed. and trans. *The Life of Glückel of Hameln* (London, 1962), p. 109.

43. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, above, n. 41.

44. H. Y. D. Azulai, *Ma'agal Tov ha-Shalem*, ed. A. Freimann, (Berlin, 1921), p. 113; *Saggio degli scritti in lingua hebraica degli eccellentissimi rabbini . . .*, ed. C. Rosenberg (Turin, 1932), 125–6.

45. Moses Margoliouth, *The Fundamental Principles of Modern Judaism Investigated* (London, 1843), 210–11. I thank Prof. S. Z. Leiman for bringing this work to my attention.

46. S. Huberband, *Kiddush ha-Shem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust*, trans. D. E. Fishman (New York, 1987), pp. 166–167.

Women and Kaddish

JOEL B. WOLOWELSKY

AT FIRST GLANCE, ANY DISCUSSION OF THE APPROPRIATENESS of women saying Kaddish, the traditional mourner's prayer, seems to be superfluous. On the one hand, those for whom egalitarianism is the major ethical principle see no possibility of excluding women from participating in this or any other synagogue experience. On the other, those committed to traditional *halakhic* norms tend to take for granted that women are excluded from any formal liturgical role.

This characterization of the *halakhic* position, however, is oversimplified. It is true, of course, that *halakha* rejects an egalitarian approach to religion, insisting that men and women have different (if overlapping) obligations and opportunities. Yet general observations cannot be applied indiscriminately to specific issues without an examination of the *halakhic* issues. Indeed, a conclusion excluding women from saying Kaddish hardly flows automatically from the sources.

Before examining those sources, however, it would be valuable briefly to take note of another issue, that of *birkhat hagomel* (the blessing that gives thanks for their deliverance) that people surviving a threatening illness or a dangerous situation must say publicly, in the presence of a *minyan* and two *talmidei hakhamim*. Hence the custom of reciting the *berakha* in the synagogue while the Torah is being read.

The issue here centers not on the *halakhic* debate over whether women can be counted in the requisite *minyan*,¹ but on whether or not they can say the *berakha*. As women cannot receive an *aliya* during an Orthodox synagogue service, we have seen the rise of the custom of a husband receiving an *aliya* and reciting the *berakha* as his wife's representative following her recovery from childbirth.

Yet, as Rabbi Moshe Sternbach² (vice-chairman of the "ultra-Orthodox" Eida Haredit) and former Israeli Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef³ point out, it has been a long-standing custom in the most Orthodox synagogues in Jerusalem for a mother recovered from childbirth to recite *birkhat hagomel* either from the women's section of the synagogue when the Torah is read or at a specially convened public celebration at home. And of course, though it is practiced in Jerusalem, the custom is not restricted to this city.

It is instructive to note R. Yosef's quick dismissal of possible objections to her doing so:⁴ The fact that she might still be *nidda* after childbirth is

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irrelevant; *nidda* status is no impediment to entering the synagogue or reciting *berakhot*. There is nothing immodest in her public recitation, because it is the *halakha* which requires the *berakha* to be said in front of a *minyan*. There is no issue of *kol isha* (hearing a woman's voice in a sexually arousing situation) or general fear of sexual arousal caused by her presence, because the Shekhina Herself is attendant with the *minyan*, and there is no sexual arousal in the company of the Shekhina; indeed, "the evil inclination is not to be found for such a short matter . . . especially nowadays when women regularly go out to public places among men. . . ." (This, he notes, is the source used to allow men and women to sit together and sing *zemirot*.) Originally, women could be called to the Torah; the reason they are not called at this time is *kevod hatsibbur* (respect for the community), not fear of arousal or *kol isha*. Thus, he concludes, "everyone concedes (*lekhool hadeiot*) that a woman may say *birkhat hagomel* in this manner."

The applicability of this logic to the question of a woman saying Kaddish is obvious. Yet, as we shall see, there has nevertheless been a reluctance on the part of many *halakhists* over the centuries to allow the matter.

The origin of Kaddish as a mourner's prayer is somewhat obscure.⁵ It praises God without making mention of the dead and is unintelligible to those who do not understand Aramaic. Yet its contemporary impact on those who grieve is clear and obvious. The obligation to say Kaddish speaks even to those distanced from *halakhic* observance. Even bereaved Jews who do not identify with the theological premise that saying Kaddish brings benefits of one sort or another to the deceased feel a sense of duty to honor their dead with the recitation of this prayer.

Kaddish is a response to death. Instead of resigning oneself to a sense of meaninglessness that accompanies a confrontation with death, one turns to tradition and its call to action. "Through the Kaddish we hurl defiance at death and its fiendish conspiracy against man," writes Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

When the mourner recites "Glorified and sanctified be the great name . . .," he declares more or less the following: No matter how powerful death is, notwithstanding the ugly end of man, however terrifying the grave is, however nonsensical and absurd everything appears, no matter how black one's despair is and how nauseating an affair life itself is, we declare and profess publicly and solemnly that we are not giving up, that we are not surrendering, that we will carry on the work of our ancestors as if nothing had happened, that we will not be satisfied with less than the full realization of the ultimate goal of the establishment of God's kingdom. . . .⁶

Not only is the mourner willing to make such declarations about himself, but he calls out to the congregation to join him. It is the elicitation of the communal response "*Amen. Yehe shemey rabba* . . ." which is traditionally seen as the main merit of saying Kaddish. Originally, writes Rabbi Naftali Zvi Roth,⁷ the mourner brought relief to the deceased by reciting "*Barekhu*" in his capacity as *hazzan* and thereby eliciting the congregation's praise of God in response.

But not everybody has the ability to act as *hazzan* (or get one of the few *aliyot* available on a Shabbat); minors would thus not be able to exercise their responsibility towards their deceased parents. Therefore, he maintains, the early authorities enacted the saying of Kaddish after the recitation of Psalms, which is outside of the formal prayer service, to provide an opportunity for those who could not act as *hazzan*.

This logic, of course, is easily extended to women. The argument is all the more compelling when we realize that the elicitation of “*yehei shemei rabba*” in response to mourner’s Kaddish is a form of *kiddush haShem* (the public sanctification of God’s name), and not only are women fully obligated in that mitzvah, but, according to some authorities, because of that obligation they may count in the *minyan* required for such a public sanctification.

Indeed, even those opposing a daughter saying Kaddish concede this. In the late seventeenth century, R. Yair Bakhrakh (*Havvot Ya’ir*)⁸ dealt with a case of a man in Amsterdam who died leaving only daughters and asked that a special *minyan* be set up to enable them to say Kaddish. The scholars and lay officials did not prevent them from doing so. R. Bakhrakh conceded that “there is no proof to contradict the matter,” agreeing that the daughter’s Kaddish brings *nahat ruah* (repose) to the deceased, that women participate in the mitzvah of *kiddush haShem*, and that Kaddish could be said because a *minyan* of men was present. But in the final analysis he would not allow her to say Kaddish, for he feared that such an innovation might weaken allegiance to existing Jewish customs.

It is important to be aware of the conscious effort being made here to separate the social responsibility of the *posek* (*halakhic* decisor) from his allegiance to the logic of the *halakhah*. There is no attempt made to suggest that the *halakhah* dictates forbidding the woman to say Kaddish. On the contrary, R. Bakhrakh rules that despite the apparent permissibility of her doing so, he must forbid it because he fears the negative impact that a permissive ruling might have on the fabric of his community. Such a decision, of course, is by definition applicable to a specific community at a specific time.

Thus, for example, it comes as no surprise that when we open the standard edition of the Mishneh Berura we find that *Ba’er Heitev* comes to a different conclusion. He writes:

In *Responsa Keneset Yehezkel*, the author wrote that it is specifically the son’s son [who can say Kaddish] but the son of the [deceased’s] daughter may not say Kaddish. And certainly the daughter has no Kaddish in the synagogue. But if they wish to form a separate *minyan* for her, they are permitted to do so. See there at the end of the section on Yore Deah.⁹

Ba’er Heitev’s ruling allowing the daughter to say Kaddish in a private *minyan* is clearly in opposition to that of the Havvot Yair, who also dealt with establishing a private *minyan* for the daughter. While this in and of itself is not surprising—*poskim* often come to different conclusions—it is significant to note

that the Keneset Yehezkel responsum to which he makes reference cites the Havvot Yair and comes to the conclusion that “If they want to form a separate *minyan* they may do so for the son of the [deceased’s] daughter or for anyone who wishes to say Kaddish for the benefit of the deceased. But not for any female whatsoever.”

Ba’er Heitev apparently read the Keneset Yehezkel to say that while the law might have allowed her to say Kaddish at home, she should not exercise this option because of the reservation suggested by Havvot Yair. Ba’er Heitev felt bound by the *halakhah* and not the policy advice. In a similar vein, Shaarei Teshuvah writes: “See Shevut Yaakov, part two, number 23. [It should read, 93.] If he had only a daughter, she may say Kaddish [but] only in her house.”¹⁰ Tel Aviv Chief Rabbi Hayim David Halevi¹¹ comments that this is no lone opinion, but rather a reflection of a then current widespread practice.

At first glance, a ruling allowing a woman to say Kaddish at home and not in synagogue seems self-contradictory. A *minyan* of men is required in either case, and any objections based on *kol isha* or the fact that women may not form the *minyan* required for the saying of Kaddish would apply to the private *minyan* as well. But the logic becomes clear when we realize that Keneset Yehezkel was addressing a synagogue protocol different from our own. His responsum dealt with a question of who has precedence to say Kaddish in the synagogue. In most modern shuls, all mourners say Kaddish together. The original custom, however, was for only one mourner to say Kaddish at any time; when two people both claimed the right, the question arose as to who had first claim. Keneset Yehezkel apparently maintains that inasmuch as women have no obligation to participate in the synagogue activities, she cannot displace a man in the synagogue who presses his claim to say Kaddish. Ba’er Heitev sees no reason to extend this to a private *minyan* where no one else has a claim to say Kaddish.

If the reason for requiring a special *minyan* for the daughter is that she has no right to say Kaddish in the synagogue and cannot displace a man who has a right to say Kaddish, it would follow that in synagogues such as ours where all mourners say Kaddish together or where no male mourner is present, a woman could say Kaddish. Indeed, this seems to have been the position of Lithuanian *poskim* of the last century.

Almost a quarter of a century ago, when the issue came up in a chapter of Yavneh, the National Religious Jewish Students Association, I asked one of the Yavneh student leaders who was then learning with the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, to put the question to him. Rabbi Ezra Bick (now at Yeshivat Har Etzion) wrote back:

I spoke to the Rav about the question you asked concerning a girl saying Kaddish. He told me that he remembered being in Vilna at the “Gaon’s Kloiz”—which wasn’t one of your modern Orthodox shuls—and a woman came into the back (there was no ezrat nashim [ladies section]) and said Kaddish after ma’ariv. I asked him whether it would make a difference if someone was saying Kaddish along with her or not, and he replied that he could see no objections in either

case—it's perfectly all right.¹² Coincidentally, checking around, I came across a number of people who remember such incidents from Europe, including my father (in my grandfather's *minyan*—he was the *rav* in the town).

Indeed, many people remember such occurrences. For example, Rabbi Pinchos Zelig Prag, gabbai of the Mir Minyan (the famous Brooklyn shul the core of whose members are former students of the Mirrer Yeshiva who came to America after the Second World War by way of Shanghai), told me that one of the congregants, Rabbi Moshe Maaruch, who was born and raised in Vilna and who studied at the Mirrer Yeshiva recalled that when his cousin died leaving an adult daughter and no sons, Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grozinsky had allowed her to say Kaddish daily in the synagogue; another recalled that the Hafetz Hayyim had similarly ruled.

Prof. Yaffa Eliach¹³ relates similar occurrences in her study of Eisheshok. Tsipora Hutner Kravitz, wife of Rabbi Yosef Kravitz, recalled to Dr. Eliach that in 1935, when she was 14 years old, her brothers were out of town when her father, Rabbi Naftali Menahem Hutner, the dayan of the town, died. She said Kaddish at the graveside and continued to say Kaddish in both the town's New Bet Midrash and Shtibel until her brother returned. She recalled that at the same time Gitel Gordon, then 18 years old, said Kaddish in the Shtibel. Another townsman recalled that when the girls said Kaddish, they wore a beret and stood in the men's section in the first row to the right of the *amud*.¹⁴

Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin also recalled that in his youth young women said Kaddish.¹⁵ He also allowed women to say Kaddish in *shul*, provided they remained in the women's section.¹⁶ He noted that in past times, when only one person said Kaddish, that person would stand in the front of the *shul*, something inappropriate for a woman. Now, though, when everyone says Kaddish together from their respective places, the woman can say Kaddish.

Rabbi Soloveitchik also insisted on the woman staying in the women's section. When at the time I had asked Rabbi Gerald J. Blidstein (then a faculty advisor to Yavneh and now at Ben Gurion University) about the issue, he wrote to me:

The Kaddish matter is as follows. I was asked about the question last year, and looking into it, could find no reason beyond "general policy" for forbidding it. I spoke to Aharon Lichtenstein [then Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University and now Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion], who had the same reaction and said he would ask the Rav [Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, his father-in-law], which he did when I was on the other end of the phone. [Rav Lichtenstein] put the question to him, and then was directed to ask me whether the girl was stationed in the *ezrat nashim*. I, of course, answered in the affirmative, and the Rav then said that of course she could say Kaddish.

While European rabbis apparently did not insist on this, I suspect that the insistence by the American *poskim* that women stay in the *ezrat nashim* stemmed in no small part from their opposition to the mixed seating that was gaining hold in many American synagogues.

It is interesting to look at some of the contemporary arguments that have been used to justify restricting Kaddish to males. The late Israeli Chief Rabbi Ben-Zion Uziel¹⁷ argues that the tradition of women not saying Kaddish is veiled in the secrets of the Kaddish itself, so “we should not initiate a new custom of daughters saying Kaddish.” Nevertheless agreeing that “we should try to find a rationale,” he offers the following argument:

The son is the continuation of the father’s physical form; by his actions and speech, and by taking his place in the community, he brings credit to his father in world of the souls. . . .

The son does this, he continues, by saying Kaddish and performing mitzvot publicly in the presence of the community (*tsibur*), which according to *halakha* must consist of ten adult males.

And this can be accomplished only by the sons who qualify to establish the Jewish *eida*, and not by the daughters, who therefore cannot say Kaddish in the *tsibur*.

The novel argument, which finds no echo in previous discussions, is less than overwhelming. Daughters saying Kaddish is not a new custom, having centuries of precedent—albeit not universally accepted—behind it. According to many *halakhists*,¹⁸ women can join with men to form a *minyan* when they have the same obligation in the mitzvah—and men and women are obligated in *kiddush haShem*. Even when they cannot form a *tsibur*, women are still part of one in which they are present. In reviewing—and dismissing—the arguments to the contrary, Rabbi Hayyim Hirschenson concludes that “there is simply no sustainable view that women are not called a *kahal* and *eida*.”¹⁹ If daughters are not part of the *eida*, neither are their mothers. Yet the son, whose Kaddish is to be part of his taking his father’s place in the *eida*, says Kaddish for his mother. Clearly the argument is at best forced.

Rabbi Hayim David Halevi²⁰ concedes the *halakhic* legitimacy of daughters saying Kaddish, noting that there is nothing strange or incomprehensible about the practice. But he limits his own permission to a private service in the home attended by only a small group of family members. A daughter cannot say Kaddish in the synagogue, because “there are all sorts of people there” and her action might result in sexual arousal, if only slight. Even the graveside is inappropriate, as the presence of a large number of people makes her saying Kaddish immodest. A home service attended by the large number of people who pay a *shiva* visit is no different from a synagogue service, and “a mitzvah cannot be achieved by way of a sin.” All of these concerns seem to be dismissed by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef’s remarks concerning saying *birkhat hagomel* in synagogue which we quoted above.

A very different negative approach is taken by Rabbi Shlomo Wahrman, author of *She’erit Yosef*. He cites R. Henkin’s position but cannot reconcile himself to it.

I fear that if we allow daughters to say Kaddish as allowed by R. Henkin, then those of our contemporaries who are out to cause confusion—their aim being to create a new Torah and, God forbid, change our traditions, always looking for a high peg on which to hang their nonsense—will rely on this to count a woman in a *minyan*, saying that the most stringent have already allowed it.²¹

He then quotes a number of authorities who agree with him that the daughters should not be allowed to say Kaddish.

We have here an honest, unabashed public policy decision. There is no attempt to ignore or argue against the objective *halakhic* permissibility of a woman saying Kaddish. Nonetheless, in this posek's opinion there is more at stake than personal sensitivity or reasoned *halakhic* analysis. Upholding the integrity of the *halakhic* system requires certain strategies; forbidding a daughter to say Kaddish is but one of them.

A similar approach is taken by Israeli Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau:

As a practical matter, it seems that we cannot rely on Rabbi Henkin's permissive ruling. Especially in our times we must be sensitive to the opinion of the *Havvot Yair*. . . . Reformers might follow and draw the conclusion that women may act as *hazzan*. . . . Therefore we cannot allow women to say Kaddish in any way.²²

One must appreciate the openness of this presentation even though the same argument can be used against any lenient ruling in just about every area of contemporary life. But one might just as well argue that the strategy is wrong, that forbidding what is permitted only encourages others to permit what is forbidden. Thus Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik writes:

Nowadays, when there are Jews fighting for equality for men and women in matters such as *aliyyot*, if Orthodox rabbis prevent women from saying Kaddish when there is a possibility for allowing it, it will strengthen the influence of Reform and Conservative rabbis. It is therefore forbidden to prevent daughters from saying Kaddish.²³

Another approach is simply to ignore the *halakhic* permissibility of women saying Kaddish. Consider, for example, Rabbi Aaron Felder's *Yesodei Semahot*, a popular summary in English of the laws of mourning. Describing the graveside service, the author writes that following Tsidduk Hadin, "the male mourner should recite the burial Kaddish."²⁴ Later, he indicates that during *avelut* it is the son who says Kaddish.²⁵ Significantly, the source of the first ruling is given as Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah 376:4, where the word "male" does not appear. Five sources are given for the second—including Kol Bo Al Avelut—and the note ends (in Hebrew), "The daughter should not say Kaddish." In general, R. Felder presents positions unequivocally in the English section but mentions alternate views in the Hebrew notes; here, though, despite the fact that the graveside is a private rather than synagogue service, the reader has no indication that some authorities allow the daughter to say Kaddish.

Kol Bo Al Avelut is an encyclopedic collection of all responsa on death-related issues. The author knows of no source or custom that allows women to say Kaddish in the synagogue; still, it is “*pashut* (simply obvious)” he writes, that she may not. He is, however, willing to consider the question of her saying Kaddish in a private *minyan*. He mentions Ba’er Heitev’s quoting Keneset Yehezkel’s opinion that the daughter may not say Kaddish in shul, but omits the former’s ruling that she may do so at a private *minyan*. The author quotes the permissive ruling of Shevut Yaakov but dismisses it as a lone opinion. “If she wants,” he concludes, “let her go to the women’s section in the synagogue and answer ‘Amen’ when Kaddish is said [by the men].”²⁶ Unfortunately, if she goes to weekday services at many—if not most—Orthodox synagogues, she will find that the bet midrash (“chapel”) used has no *ezrat nashim*.

One cannot deny an author the right to side with those authorities who forbid a daughter to say Kaddish. But he must be prepared to include in his presentation those sources with which he does not agree. The *halakhic* legitimacy of women saying Kaddish is unassailable even if not universally accepted. Thus, even if a rabbi feels that it is in society’s best interest not to allow an orphaned daughter to say Kaddish, he should make it clear that he knows that other *poskim* hold otherwise. That is the approach responsible *poskim* regularly follow in all other areas of *halakhah* when answering personal questions. In a healthy *halakhic* community, people generally feel bound by their personal *halakhic* authority.

While many will pass up the opportunity to exercise an option which all agree is not obligatory, finding solace in a more passive role, a woman who regularly attends *shul* will feel resentment when she learns later that a most meaningful, legitimate option was withheld from her. The rabbi, in his role as counselor, has an obligation to bring all legitimate options to the attention of the mourner.

NOTES

1. Aryeh A. Frimer, “Women and *Minyan*,” *Tradition* 23 (Summer 1988):4, p. 64. Also see Rochelle L. Millen, “*Birkhat Hagomel*: Cultural Context and Halakhic Practice,” *JUDAISM* 43 (Summer 1994), no. 3, pp. 270-78, and “Communications: “*Birkhat Hagomel*,” *JUDAISM* 44 (Winter 1995), no. 1, pp. 115-117.
2. Rabbi Moshe Sternbach, *Responsa Teshuvot veHanhagot* (Jerusalem, 5746 [1986]), number 195, p. 72.
3. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, *Responsa Yehave Da-at* (Jerusalem, 5741 [1981]), vol. 4, responsum 15, pp. 75-78.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
5. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Roth, “Azkara vехаftara vekaddish yetom,” *Talpiyot*, 7:2-4, Tishrei 5721 [1961], pp. 369-81.
6. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “A Eulogy for the Talner Rebbe,” in Joseph Epstein, ed., *Shiurei Harav: A Conspectus of Public Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (New York: Hamevaser, 1974), p. 20.

7. Roth, p. 375.
8. Rabbi Yair Bakhrakh, *Responsa Havvot Ya'ir*, number 222.
9. Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi, *Ba'er Heitev*, commentary to Orah Hayyim, section 132. n. 5, p. 27 in vol. 2 of standard Mishnah Berurah.
10. Rabbi Hayyim Mordecai Margoliot, *Shaarei Teshuva*, n.5 in Mishnah Berurah ad loc.
11. Rabbi Hayim David Halevi, *Aseh Lekha Rav* (Tel Aviv, 5743 [1983]), vol. 5, no. 33, pp. 230–36.
12. There is nothing surprising about allowing the female mourner to say Kaddish by herself. The private *minyanim* which many *poskim* allowed to be set up for a female mourner were by definition services where she said Kaddish by herself. Any objections concerning *kol isha*, *tsniut* [modesty], etc. would apply equally to the private or synagogue *minyan* (as they would to her saying *birkhat hagomel*). She could not say Kaddish in the synagogue because of the protocol then in effect in which the male mourners had a claim to the Kaddish.
13. I am grateful to Dr. Eliach for sharing this material from her forthcoming book, *The Shtetl*, soon to be published by Little Brown. Dr. Eliach's photo collection of the townspeople of Eisheshok is part of the permanent exhibition at the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.
14. This practice found its way to America. Writing about an Orthodox synagogue in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in the early twentieth century, Herman Eliot Snyder ("The American Synagogue World of Yesterday, 1901–1925," *American Jewish Archives* 42:1 (Spring/ Summer 1990), p. 72) notes: "Despite this strict separation of the men and women, a young girl, perhaps sixteen years old, would enter the men's section to recite the Kaddish for a parent. No one ever made protest or even a comment."
15. Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, *Sefer Teshuvot Ibra*, vol. 2 (New York: Ezrat Torah, 1989), "Amirat Kaddish al yedei haBat," no. 4 (2), p. 6.
16. Ibid., no. 4 (1), pp. 3–5. (This is a reprint of his article by the same name that appeared in *Hapardes*, 38:6, pp. 5–6.) Rabbi Henkin's student and grandson, Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin, published an extensive discussion and explanation of that decision in his "Amirat kaddish al yedei isha vetsiruf laminyan me-ezrat nashim," *Hadarom*, no. 54, Sivan 5745 [1985], pp. 34–48, reprinted in his *Responsa Benei Banim*, vol. 2, 1992, no. 6, pp. 23–30.
17. Rabbi Ben-Zion Uriel, *Responsa Mishpatei Uziel*, Tanina vol. 1, no. 13, pp. 37–38.
18. Frimer, "Women and *Minyan*."
19. Rabbi Hayim Hirschenson, *Malki baKodesh* (Hoboken, NJ, 5681 [1921]), vol. 2, p. 201.
20. Halevi, *Aseh Lekha Rav*.
21. Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Wahrman, *She'erit Yosef*, Vol. 11 (New York: Balsham, 1981), p. 299f.
22. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, *Yahel Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 5752 [1992]), vol. 2, no. 90, p. 479.
23. Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik, *Od Yisrael Yosef Beni Hai* (Yeshivas Brisk, 1993), no. 32, p. 100.
24. Rabbi Aaron Felder. *Yesodei Semahot*, part I (New York: Balsham, 1974), section 4.1, p. 50, emphasis added.
25. Ibid., p. 123, n. 1.
26. Rabbi Yekutiel Grenwald, *Kol Bo Al Avelut*, Vol. 1 (New York: Feldheim, 1965), p. 375.

Covered Mirrors

After my father's death
 I sat shiva.
Mirrors covered, we received
friends and relatives in the evening
and I sat on a wooden box. They
brought food and conversation
to sustain us, no laughter.

 Rooted in tradition, they
all pictured me in a pit of ashes,
 my clothes rent. . . .

Alone, during the next day
 I saw him
spit-polishing shoes,
 an exacting ritual like
combing his full straw moustache
 – little things which
I desperately wanted to freeze
 in the amber of my brain.

That night, as if reborn, we
were overwhelmed by visitors
 laden with hot dishes,
cold cuts, fruit and joy.
Only the somber presence
 of elder uncles and aunts
dampened the false festive air.
 Out of guilt, I joined
my relatives in eating mere
 plain cake and drinking
black coffee. . . .

When our two girls,
 five and seven, entered
the dining room, their
 heads and faces covered
with silk scarves, I did not laugh
 with the others as
Jan said, giggling:
 Papa and Mama, we
covered our faces . . . so
 you won't see *you*
 in our eyes.

Humbly, I heard
 His message.

Conservative Rabbis, Their Movement, and American Judaism

GERALD L. ZELIZER

ON THE EVE OF ITS NORTH AMERICAN CENTENNIAL, THE Conservative movement has demonstrated a series of accomplishments that point to its increased vitality within American religious Judaism. The National Jewish Population Study of 1990 found that the largest number of American Jews affiliate with Conservative synagogues. A shift within many Conservative synagogues away from late-Friday evening to Shabbat-morning services has been accompanied by a significant parallel increase in the number of young couples attending those services. Camp Ramah is oversubscribed. Day-school education, generally eschewed in the first hundred years of Conservative Judaism, is currently so accepted that the number of students in Solomon Schechter schools has burgeoned to 18,000 within the last decade. This parochial-school growth has occurred even in medium-sized cities like Las Vegas and Phoenix. Recent presidents of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA)¹ and the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)² are products of Conservatism's synagogues and institutions, rather than refugees from Orthodox or Reform. Remarkably, these religious and programmatic accomplishments have taken place at the same time that the Conservative movement remains hospitable to pluralistic ideological views which generate healthy, if sometimes heated, debates.

During my presidency of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1992–1994, I confronted both the energy and problematics that characterize the Conservative movement. Four major episodes illustrated the direction of the movement at the approach of the new century. The first, “Prioritizing the Sexual Agenda,” was a debate over the boundaries of authentic Judaism as defined by Conservative Judaism. The second, “Religious Authority: Lay-Rabbinic Relations,” defined who determines the Conservative definition of Judaism. The third, “Reasserting RA Presence in National Jewish Politics,” refined the priority mission of the association of Conservative rabbis. The fourth, “Jewish

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Ecumenicism: A Lost Opportunity,” was an example of our search for partners in achieving portions of that mission. All four matters were played out through an intellectual and political process, with implications not only for Conservative Judaism but for American Judaism as a whole.

Prioritizing the Sexual Agenda

In the last half of the twentieth century, three issues aroused contentious halakhic debate within Conservative Judaism: the agunah (“chained” woman, whose husband would not grant her a religious divorce), during the 1940s and 1950s; women’s inclusion in public ritual and rabbinic ordination, during the 1970s and 1980s; and homosexuality, during the 1990s. The fact that all three subjects involve human sexuality is compelling evidence that religion and sex often cannot be separated.

The matter of homosexual egalitarianism had the potential of fracturing the Conservative movement in the early 1990s. The issue of female egalitarianism had already split the movement in the 1980s when significant numbers of Conservative rabbis and lay people established the separatist Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, whose initial agenda was opposition to rabbinic ordination of women. My predecessor’s administration produced a religious policy that disallowed the ordination of gays and lesbians, as well as the refusal of the movement to send rabbinic candidates to a gay congregation. On the eve of my installation as president of the RA, my predecessor warned me: “I fear that this question is not over and it threatens to subsume all else.”

Conservative Judaism had proudly championed the slogan “Tradition and Change.” The movement’s debate historically on many issues concerned the proper weighing of these two influences. Again, on the issue of homosexuality, two polar viewpoints clashed. The first contended that the biblical and rabbinic delegitimation of homosexuality was the final word. Any change was beyond the parameters of traditional Judaism. Homosexuals, as all errant Jews, were to be welcomed in our movement, but acts of homosexuality were to be deemed religiously deviant. The other side argued that a moral imperative dictated that change should modify tradition. After all, the Halakhah had throughout Jewish history drawn on its own inner dynamics to effect similar change when morality compelled.

These polar ideological positions potentially could have split the Conservative movement. The Rabbinical Assembly convention of 1992 passed a resolution mandating a study of all human sexuality, and not exclusively homosexuality. It was to be completed within two years and reported to the Committee on Law and Standards (CJLS),³ which establishes religious policy for the movement. My administration faithfully implemented that resolution; by absorbing the more divisive homosexual question into the larger topic, we hoped to mute the sharper ideological issues that might have created a fissure.

This transformation was brought about through a tortuous but deliberate political process.

Much of the agitation for homosexual egalitarianism began within the Jewish Theological Seminary. Among the leading voices that stimulated the public discussion at the 1992 RA convention were professors on the Seminary faculty. In addition, a homosexual student group was permitted to meet within the Seminary walls. Nevertheless, it was the Seminary's chancellor, Dr. Ismar Schorsch, who, at the 1993 RA convention, spoke for those who chastised the RA for devoting its energies to the study of human sexuality:

The Rabbinical Assembly stands today before a momentous choice—whether to persist grappling with the issue of homosexuality as if it were but a replay of the [women's] egalitarian struggle, or to rededicate itself to the challenge of Jewish Continuity. The former comes from outside, the latter from below. To persist will throw the Rabbinical Assembly into an ideological civil war in which there will be no winner.⁴

When, at a later date, I asked the chancellor about the contradiction between his internal and external stance, he explained that the incubation of this controversy at the Seminary was tolerated under the principle of academic freedom. Clearly, his dual role as head of an academic institution and titular head of the entire Conservative movement required contradictory postures on this sensitive matter.

By working through the governing board of the Rabbinical Assembly, known as the Executive Council,⁵ I was determined to implement the convention's will and to insure that it was the CJLS which would ultimately determine final religious policy. At the Executive Council's first meeting in June 1992, and after much political posturing by all sides, a resolution was passed which charted the way of the Human Sexuality Commission:⁶ "The Commission is charged to investigate the *multiple* areas and issues on human sexuality in order to *inform* the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards about the findings and understandings that its studies generate" (emphasis mine). During the course of Human Sexuality Commission meetings of the next two years, whenever individual members veered off course, they were reminded of these parameters.

My initial list of prospective appointees to the Commission attempted to include candidates representing the entire ideological and halakhic spectrum, but my intent was not realized. Regrettably, some more halakhically stringent candidates either rejected appointment or stonewalled. One acknowledged that the chancellor of the Seminary had persuaded him not to participate. When I objected to Dr. Schorsch of his interference in an internal matter of the RA, he responded: "There is no need for a second Reform Judaism in America." He was arguing that in this instance, tradition did not allow change; that halakhic Judaism could not accede to extra-halakhic considerations. The United Synagogue, the lay body of Conservative Juda-

ism, also declined our invitation to participate on the Commission and its leadership was equally vocal in criticizing its establishment. Ironically, had the Seminary and the United Synagogue participated in the deliberations, they would have been able to help shape a different conclusion, which they both preferred. Their absence allowed some of the more controversial portions to emerge.

This process was seriously interrupted by an uproar over sexual allegations concerning a Seminary professor and by the public declaration of an RA member that he was a practicing homosexual. The press reported that at a Gay Rights march in Washington in March 1993, Rabbi Howard Handler alleged that his congregation in Manhattan had not renewed his contract after learning through an anonymous phone call that he was gay and that he sought rabbinical placement in another synagogue.⁷ "I'm a test case for the Conservative Movement," he challenged. "I wouldn't take a job without saying that I'm gay."⁸

The issues before the Rabbinical Assembly were: Was the placing of a gay colleague into a pulpit a de facto subversion of the Conservative movement's halakhic position that homosexuality was religiously deviant? In fairness, should we "grandfather" in a gay rabbi who was already a member of the RA prior to policy that denied admission of gays to the JTS Rabbinical School and the RA? Who should decide these questions? Within the leadership, some voices pleaded compassion. By not placing such a colleague, we were in effect expelling him from the Rabbinical Assembly. Others argued for justice. We had historically denied congregational placement to other colleagues who publicly violated the halakhah of the movement. Why should a gay rabbi, who abrogated the halakhah regarding sexuality, be treated differently?

Who would make this difficult decision? Because of its complexity, I decided on three stages. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards would first rule on the halakhic components of the question. With the halakhah resolved, the movement's Joint Placement Commission⁹ would then administer the decision. Lastly, the Executive Council would reserve its right to instruct our delegates votes on that same Commission.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards was asked to interpret the halakhah. The procedure of the CJLS for the last ten years is that a minimum of six votes constitute a valid opinion, irrespective of the number of votes endorsing diverse positions. It is not unusual, therefore, to have two equally accepted opinions that are far apart, even opposite. These diverse views constitute the range from which the local rabbinic authority, the *mara d'atra*,¹⁰ is advised to formulate his/her own opinion. And so it happened in this debate. Two papers, one stating that the colleague could be placed in a congregation and the other that he could not, received the necessary votes. Both became Halakhah. My intent was to allow the Executive Council to function as the movement's *mara d'atra* and to choose between the two responsa.

My vice president and I crafted a compromise proposal which we felt would treat our colleague compassionately, yet at the same time maintain heterosexuality as the religious norm. Would the Placement Commission agree to allow Rabbi Handler to seek placement on his own initiative, without penalty, within the Conservative movement? My argument had been that this compromise enabled us to “grandfather” an already existent member, without abrogating the movement’s policy not to ordain or accept homosexual rabbis into the RA. This item was put on the agenda of the Executive Council meeting of June 1994. On the eve of that meeting, I was heartened that both the Seminary and United Synagogue representatives on the Placement Commission agreed to the compromise. Seventy communications from RA members objecting to our treatment of Rabbi Handler underscored both the public and volatile nature of this dispute.

To my consternation, the Joint Placement Commission rejected the compromise; instead they ruled that Rabbi Handler could not be placed at that time. In their view, he had violated the halakhah of the movement as clearly as if he had violated the Shabbat. Frustrated that a solution had slipped through my fingers, I reacted indignantly to the chairman, and in our teleconference call communicated my disappointment to the Executive Council. The council, agitated that we could not find relief for our colleague, instructed our professional staff not to penalize him if he sought a position on his own initiative. It allowed him to be the exception to the general rule that members of the RA can find congregational employment only through the aegis of the movement’s Joint Placement Commission.

Although resolution of the placement issue was organizationally sound, Rabbi Handler was ultimately left without a pulpit position. The solution was painfully inadequate, but the most that could be done within the current boundaries of the Conservative movement. A different administrative decision might, on the one hand, have been interpreted as equating homosexuality with heterosexuality, a symbolic upset of the delicate balance of “Tradition and Change.” On the other hand, disenfranchising a colleague whose membership preceded the original Law Committee decision, might have been understood as an unjust and immoral action. The administration’s political decisions implemented the ideology that is fundamental to our centrist movement, and maintained a moral stance.

Of all the correspondence on the matter, the most moving was a letter from the homosexual child of a colleague:

Can you understand the schizophrenic demand you are making of us? . . . We [gay and lesbian] Jews come into the synagogue . . . but are not allowed to consecrate our lives or our commitments with one another within any kind of traditional Jewish context because [the RA] will not stand for that . . . Look at the full text of the Holiness Code and at how carefully our Movement has chosen from among its parts. I was the son of a very traditional rabbi, yet I was many years an adult before I ever learned of the practice of Nidah [family

purity]. I never learned any injunction against the eating of rare steak but there it is in the code also. . . . Because . . . Judaism is important to me I feel I must point out the inconsistencies of your position. . . . While the Law Committee tries to untwist this pretzel and fashion a pilpul that your detractors will not respect anyway, our lives are in the sand that passes through the glass.

In the course of the debate over the mega-issues of homosexuality, it became clear that a good part of the laity of the Conservative movement, as well as the rabbinic and Seminary community, will not accept radical innovations, for example, admission of practicing gays to the Seminary's Rabbinical School and/or sanctification of gay unions. The most that could be tolerated in the near future are changes on the many micro-issues faced in some congregations—such as what status to afford the gay parents of a bar-mitzvah child; what mourning practices are permitted a homosexual who has lost a partner; should the gay commitment ceremonies of members of children be acknowledged in synagogue bulletins. The larger matters will have to be postponed for at least ten years.

Both a substantive and tonal change accompanied the final report at the RA convention of May 1994. The "Pastoral Letter on Human Intimacy" delineated the broad topic of human sexuality. It included four sections: general values of the Jewish religious tradition that bear upon sexuality; Jewish norms for marital intimacy; heterosexual relations outside of the bonds of marriage; and homosexuality. Disagreement between colleagues over that report was intense but civil. The rancor which prevailed one year earlier at the Los Angeles convention had mellowed. This change was partially because the administration had in the interim structured regional study days on the subject of homosexuality, at which members had already expressed their feelings.

Press reports on the final pastoral letter of the Human Sexuality Commission highlighted its statements on sexual relations between unmarried singles. The controversy over homosexuality was buried deep within each article. Findings on sex between singles, although also controversial, were still within the tolerable boundaries of movement-wide debate. That shift of both public and organizational attention was the result of this deliberate, if somewhat tortuous process throughout the two years.

Much was accomplished in placing a religious discussion of human sexuality on the Conservative movement's agenda. For the first time, a rabbinic group was willing to tackle publicly this fundamental and sacred aspect of life. The Rabbinical Assembly abandoned the far easier approach of "Don't ask, don't tell" and creatively interpreted its watchwords "Tradition and Change" for the life issues of many American Jews who seek religious guidance in such matters. The pastoral letter is part of a broader process that will define religious norms of human sexuality through ongoing intramovement discussion and especially through the Committee on Law and Standards.

Religious Authority in Conservative Judaism: Lay-Rabbinic Relationships

In recent history, institutional religion and its spokespeople, the clergy, have been regularly challenged by informal religious arrangements. An April 1994 Gallup Poll discovered that whereas a large percentage of Americans pray daily, most worship at home and not in formal religious settings. William McKinney goes so far as to contend that “for mainline churches, at least, individualism in religion reigns supreme. Questions of authority, discipline, community, and order seem foreign.”¹¹ According to historian Jack Wertheimer, this extra-institutional spiritual propellant has caused such diverse Jewish growth within American Judaism as the havurah movement, feminist Judaism, gay synagogues, communities of rural Jews, and the Jewish renewal movement.

The Conservative movement was created centrifugally. The Jewish Theological Seminary spawned an alumni association which became the Rabbinical Assembly; Solomon Schechter, first president of that new Seminary, was simultaneously the first president of the United Synagogue.¹²

Both the general societal context and Conservatism’s history have caused the lay leadership of the United Synagogue to become increasingly frustrated with its position in the hierarchy of the movement. This has resulted in a decade-long struggle to rearrange the religious “pecking order” of Conservative Judaism. They are encouraged by some spokespeople of the movement, such as Neil Gillman, who advocates greater empowerment of the layperson:

Since the 1980s, this authoritarian model has begun to crumble . . . our people are no longer unlettered . . . now the rabbi must learn to relate to congregants in a very different way. The rabbi must set forth expectations, primarily the expectation that the congregants will become responsible Jews. The rabbi must also be ready to share his or her authority in determining the religious style of the synagogue.¹³

At stake is the issue of who determines what is Conservative Judaism and its religious policy. Is it the rabbi or the lay person; a central hierarchy or local authority?

The struggle over this question took place in the context of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, the supreme and autonomous committee of rabbis which establishes halakhic religious policy for the Movement, and on the related issue of *mara d’atra*, the local rabbi as ultimate halakhic authority.

What is the ultimate authority for halakhic decision making within Conservative Judaism? The answer is summed up in *Emet Vemunah*,¹⁴ a statement of principles, endorsed by all arms of the movement:

Authority for religious practice in each congregation resides in its rabbi, its Mara D’Atra. In making decisions, rabbis may consult with the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS). Parameters set by that Committee and at Rabbinical Assembly conventions govern all of the rabbis of the Rabbinical Assembly, but within those bounds

there are variations of practice recognized as both legitimate and in many cases, contributory to the richness of Jewish life (emphasis added).

The CJLS is a respected and influential guide for rabbis, but the local rabbi remains the final interpreter of halakhah. The only exception to this advisory role is when a CJLS ruling has been passed as a standard of rabbinic practice, which requires a recommendation by 80 percent of the membership of the CJLS, and confirmation by the plenum at a convention of the Rabbinical Assembly. There are only three standards that are binding: the prohibition of rabbinic officiation at intermarriage; matrilineal definition of Jewishness; and the requirement of a Get (religious divorce) prior to remarriage.

The goal of mara d'atra was to allow for decision-making by the local rabbi who best understood the idiosyncrasies of his/her community. It precludes the imposition of mandatory halakhic rulings from a religious hierarchy that is unaware or insensitive to the nuances created by local community. The system of mara d'atra has prevailed since the inception of the Conservative movement and was adopted from the responsa literature of Europe.

Lay initiatives to unilaterally overturn this policy of rabbinic authority became relentless. They unfolded in the context of the Rabbinical Assembly's attempt with the United Synagogue from 1990 to 1994 to formulate a joint model contract for rabbis and congregations. By January of 1993, after almost five years of negotiation, the RA had secured agreement on most of the document. A major outstanding disagreement was the precise relationship of the local rabbi to the CJLS.

In the spring of 1993, the United Synagogue mailed to congregational presidents a copy of its own contract. It included clauses intended to eviscerate the concept of mara d'atra. In their version of the contract, the rabbi was "specifically and expressly subject to all rulings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, and any changes to be made in the rituals, rites and customs heretofore conducted . . . by the synagogue . . . may be made by the Ritual Committee and/or Board of Trustees in consultation with the Rabbi." I asked that our own version of the contract be sent out immediately, retaining the clause that the rabbi was the mara d'atra, including a forewarning to colleagues not to negotiate away the essential and fundamental halakhic authority of the rabbi.

The matter is still unresolved. Two differing statements enunciating polar sources of religious authority are currently in the hands of the Conservative movement's lay people and their rabbis.

I defended the principle of mara d'atra so doggedly because the shifting of religious authority away from the rabbi to the layperson would result in halakhah being based on whim and feelings rather than learning and knowledge of Torah. In addition, if a Committee on Jewish Law and Standards were to impose more uniform religious categories, rigid hierarchical edicts would undermine nuanced responses to local conditions. Neither of those changes would serve the idiosyncratic conditions of local American

congregations nor the defining principle of Judaism as a learned religious tradition. The principle of *mara d'atra* is central to the Conservative movement for good reason.

Reasserting RA Presence in National Jewish Politics: Achievements and Limitations

Should a significant portion of a rabbinical organization's mission consist of impacting national Jewish policy-making? To what extent does that detract from the primary function of assisting member rabbis in furthering religious Judaism? During my administration I decided to reassert our presence nationally because I believed that a more prominent national presence for the Rabbinical Assembly elevated the profile of the local rabbi and assisted him/her to further the core religious agenda.

The affirmation of our national presence took place in the arena of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.¹⁵ The most consistent participation of the RA was in the 1970s, when both the president and the executive vice president were regular participants. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, that participation declined because the dominant view was that our involvement in national Jewish politics diluted our effort on behalf of our primary religious mission. During the two years of my administration, I reestablished an RA presence in this important assemblage. The executive vice president and I attended over fifty meetings of the Conference. They were of three kinds: ceremonial, in which a country's president, minister or ambassador would make a presentation and entertain questions and answers; special VIP missions to the Mideast; and regular working committees that established policy.

Because I attended regularly, I was sometimes invited to participate in the more substantive deliberations. For instance, during a mission to the Middle East, which included a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, the chairman of the Conference allowed my appeal for the release to Israel of hundreds of Torah scrolls which remained in synagogues of the near-extinct Egyptian Jewish community. The Israel-PLO accord in September 1993 resulted in acrimonious debate in the American Jewish community and a small bomb was found outside the offices of both Peace Now and the New Israel Fund. The President's Conference decided to respond by drawing up a statement on civil discourse among Jews and accepted my draft proposal. These were all new opportunities for the RA to become a more significant player in the formulation of national Jewish policy.

Nevertheless, many secular Jewish leaders do not envision representation of rabbinic organizations in primary national leadership positions. Significantly, the chairmanship of the President's Conference has never been bestowed on an RA president. In recent years it has passed over all religious leadership to the presidents of secular organizations. Because the presidents of

these organizations are either entrepreneurs or partners in New York law firms, they are more regularly available, whereas local commitments restrict the attendance of a congregational rabbi.

In needful moments the RA remained unassisted by the Conference because secular Jewish leadership does not envision the primacy of the rabbinic role in shaping national Jewish policy. Although Orthodox organizations are included in the President's Conference, they represent at best 10 percent of American Jewry. On the other hand, the Conservative and Reform components of the Conference constitute numerically the largest combined organizational constituency in American Judaism, "*amcha*," that is, grass-roots Judaism. The local and national leadership of the Jewish Federations are largely members of Conservative and Reform synagogues and the various stands taken by the Conference are hence more widely disseminated through the religious organizations than either secular or Orthodox bodies. The success of transmitting this reality may yet result in the presidents of rabbinic organizations becoming more prominent participants in national Jewish politics and policy-making.

Jewish Ecumenicism: A Lost Opportunity

With whom could the Rabbinical Assembly collaborate in implementing our religious mission? Indifference and assimilation are threats to all serious religious Jews and the problems would best be tackled in the unified actions of all Jewish denominations and their rabbis. In past years, there had been abortive efforts to create a unified Bet Din with the Orthodox and Reform in order to establish common standards of conversion, marriage, and religious divorce within the entire Jewish community. Those failed efforts had left many in the Conservative movement wary of attempting any further effort at serious Jewish ecumenicism. Perhaps that was because we sought concurrence instead of collaboration. Would we stand a better chance of shared forums in which each rabbinate presented its respective view on major issues, even when there was disagreement?

I decided that the college campus was a fertile area in which to begin, and therefore proposed to the President of Reform and Orthodox rabbinical organizations establishing panels of rabbis on selected university campuses to present our respective viewpoints on subjects such as Jewish continuity and intermarriage. SUNY-Binghamton was eventually selected as the site for the first panel discussion and both the professional and student population on campus were excited over the prospect. Regrettably, our attempts to concretize this plan with both Orthodox and Reform representatives over the next few months were unsuccessful: it became clear that it was a higher organizational priority for us than for them. The projected date passed and the effort was abandoned.

A similar experience was our discussion on the possibility of a conference on religious pluralism, to be convened in various cities. The executive vice

president of the New York Board of Rabbis enthusiastically accepted the responsibility to coordinate such a conclave under the auspices of Boards of Rabbis in various key cities. Subjects, presenters, and sites were proposed and we agreed that each national rabbinic president would designate the attendees so as to exclude doctrinaire “hotheads” who might torpedo the conference. Yet again, on the verge of final planning, the President of the Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox) informed us that resistance within his executive precluded the realistic possibility of such a parley.

These immediate frustrations should not force the matter off the agenda. The challenge of assimilation and indifference among American Jewry are too daunting to be combated by separate “spiritual armies” rather than in a coordinated campaign. Substantive changes will occur only after trust and confidence among rabbis have been established. The initiation of these discussions between the presidents of the three rabbinical organizations was an important beginning in forging that trust.

Conclusions

Both the critics and supporters of the Conservative movement acknowledge that it is “rabbi driven.”

It is the rabbi, more than anyone else, who most exemplifies the religious lifestyle of Conservative Judaism . . . it [the Rabbinical Assembly] had also become aware that the Conservative rabbi was a singularly lonely person. Both the Reform and Orthodox colleagues of the Conservative rabbi enjoyed a kinship of religious vision and practice with their lay communities. In contrast, the Conservative rabbi inhabited a different world from that of the lay community.¹⁶

The Rabbinical Assembly not only provides collegiality for the individual member rabbi in that “lonely world,” but also the resources to shape the religious vision and practice which become Conservative Judaism.

The years 1992–94 yielded other contributions from the Rabbinical Assembly to both the Conservative movement and American Judaism: the publication of pamphlets on such contemporary religious issues as conversion, brit milah, and the afterlife; a comprehensive curriculum for outreach to interfaith couples which was tested by over fifty congregational rabbis; the initial editing of a new inspirational Humash commentary, and several social-justice initiatives.

But it is the four matters reviewed in this article which most shaped our religious vision and practice: the application of Jewish values to the wide spectrum of human intimacy; the insistence on religious authority remaining with those who are most learned in Torah; the attempt to influence national Jewish policy with a rabbinic perspective; and the seeking of a partnership with our rabbinic counterparts in confronting the most daunting challenges to Jewish continuity.¹⁷

NOTES

1. The international association of Conservative rabbis with approximately 1,400 members. Within the Conservative movement, the Rabbinical Assembly fulfills three major roles: it contributes to American Judaism; to the overall Conservative movement; and to the professional security and enhancement of the member rabbi.
2. The academic institution of the Conservative movement which educates candidates preparing to be rabbis, cantors, principals and teachers. Its professors also further Jewish scholarship through research.
3. This body establishes religious policy for the Conservative movement, based on scholarly papers which must be adopted by a minimum of six rabbis in order to become an official position. Twenty-four rabbis serve on the committee.
4. "Marching to the Wrong Drummer," Ismar Schorsch, Address to RA convention on March 23, 1993, reprinted in *Conservative Judaism*, Summer 1993, p. 19.
5. This is equivalent to a board of directors.
6. This commission, established by resolution at the RA's 1992 national convention, was empowered to study all forms of human sexuality and to present its findings at the 1994 convention to the Committee on Law and Standards.
7. Members of the RA may find employment only through the aegis of the movement's Joint Placement Commission, based on a system of seniority and eligibility. Neither rabbis nor congregations can arrange work outside of this system.
8. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *Daily News Bulletin*, April 26, 1993; and June 1, 1993.
9. This is a joint committee of the Conservative movement composed of representatives from the Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue, and Jewish Theological Seminary, which facilitates placement of rabbis in congregations and other positions. Its operations are guided by both an administrative and ethical protocol that allows rabbis to interview for pulpits based on both the seniority of the rabbi and the size and location of the synagogue.
10. Aramaic, literally "teacher (authority) of the place."
11. Quoted in Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Contemporary Judaism in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 89-90.
12. This lay arm of the Conservative movement represents approximately 800 synagogues throughout the world.
13. Neil Gillman, *Conservative Judaism, The New Century* (New York: Behrman House, 1993), p. 204.
14. Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism-Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America, Women's League for Conservative Judaism and Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, p. 25.
15. This is an umbrella organization composed of the president and executive vice president of most Jewish organizations with a national constituency and full-time executive. It was established in the mid-1960s in order to project a more unified voice on Israel-related matters.
16. Gillman, *Conservative Judaism*, p. 119.
17. Acknowledgements: The editorial assistance of my wife, Viviana Zelizer, was throughout, generous and insightful. My son Julian Zelizer made valuable suggestions in the latter stages. Rabbi Alan Silverstein was a true friend and helpful reader.

Response

JONATHAN D. SARNA

RABBI GERALD L. ZELIZER, IN HIS ARTICLE, PROVIDES US with an unusually candid review and appraisal of the Conservative rabbinate during his own term as Rabbinical Assembly president. His analysis is in many ways a primary source for students of American Judaism. Although I understand some issues differently than he does, his paper contributes in significant ways to our understanding of the state of the Conservative movement in the 1990s.

The paper begins on an optimistic note. Conservative Judaism, from the perspective of its rabbinic leadership, is increasingly vital. The largest number of American Jews affiliate with its synagogues, its camps and schools are thriving, and its leadership is increasingly home-grown. Why then, one wonders, is it so widely perceived as being mired in crisis? To set the record straight, Rabbi Zelizer examines four major episodes from his term in office that, in his words, "illustrate the direction of the movement at the approach of the century."

A closer look suggests that the Conservative movement is not nearly so healthy as Rabbi Zelizer would have us believe. The same source to which he alludes, the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, found that the number of self-identifying Reform Jews exceeds the parallel number of Conservative Jews by 42.4 percent to 37.8 percent. It also discovered slightly more Reform than Conservative households (41.4 percent to 40.4 percent) in the United States.¹ This represents a significant change from the 1970 National Jewish Population Study, which found Conservative Judaism dominating Reform by a ten-point margin, 40.4 percent to 30 percent.² A recent survey of the Jewish population of New York shows a similar trend. Back in 1981, the Conservative movement boasted more self-identifying members (35 percent) in New York than the Reform Movement (29 percent). Ten years later, Reform had overtaken Conservative Judaism by a 34.2 percent to 33.1 percent margin.³ Community studies concluded since 1979 in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Hartford, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. also find Reform predominant, although in other cities, like Atlanta, Baltimore, Miami, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, the Conservative movement retains its lead.⁴

The most revealing statistic of all, to my mind, has been published by Sidney Goldstein, based on raw data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. Looking at the critical 25–44-year-old-age group, Goldstein finds Reform with a whopping 18 percent margin over the Conservative Movement, 50.6 percent to 32.6 percent.⁵ This seemingly confirms the trend that Charles Liebman discovered back in 1979: "Among married children of Conservative families only 39 percent

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have affiliated with Conservative synagogues.”⁶ Admittedly, the Conservative movement retains its dominance in the 18–25 age group. Rabbi Zelizer informs us that in many other respects too the movement is on track. But given the substantial loss of its young people of child-bearing age, many of them apparently to the Reform movement, Liebman’s 1979 warning must unfortunately be repeated: “the Conservative movement is in very serious trouble.”⁷

Why is it in such serious trouble? This is obviously not the place for a full-scale analysis. Rabbi Zelizer’s account does, however, suggest several problems that, to my mind, cry out for attention.

First, the problem of *polarization*. The Conservative movement enjoyed its greatest period of growth in an earlier era when a majority of Americans believed in the virtues of “consensus,” and spoke approvingly of what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., called “the vital center.”⁸ Conservative Judaism’s message, at that time, seemed to reinforce what American culture itself was preaching. By contrast, recent decades have witnessed a turn away from consensus and toward growing cultural polarization. James Davidson Hunter appropriately entitled his influential book on American society, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991). Jack Wertheimer’s *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (1993) uncovers many of these same trends within the Jewish community. That the Conservative movement, largely the product of a consensus era, finds itself internally divided and unable to thrive in the polarized atmosphere of contemporary America hardly seems surprising. Its centrist message no longer wins reinforcement from the surrounding culture and appears in some fundamental respects at odds with it.

Rabbi Zelizer provides two examples from his experience as Rabbinical Assembly president that exemplify this problem. First, he discusses how his carefully constructed effort to forge a middle ground on the volatile issue of “homosexual egalitarianism” collapsed due to pressure from adherents of “polar ideological positions” within the movement. When he sought to construct a classic Conservative compromise on this issue, complete with two opposing responsa and a proposal that would at once “treat our [homosexual] colleague compassionately yet at the same time maintain heterosexuality as the religious norm,” both sides attacked him (although administratively he succeeded in accomplishing his goal). The problem, as he clearly realizes, transcends the issue of homosexuality itself: in microcosm, it represents a critical challenge facing the Conservative movement as a whole. Can it find a golden mean between those who believe that halakha is transcendent and those who believe no less fervently in the need to accommodate halakha to contemporary culture? Or, like so much of American culture, will it abandon its quest for a middle way and split into two polarized camps?

Rabbi Zelizer’s second example, “Jewish ecumenicism” (to my mind, an unfortunate term, borrowed as it is from the “ecumenical” effort to unite the whole Christian world), projects this same problem beyond the Conservative movement to the issue of “collaboration” among the different branches of Judaism. Here, too, cultural and religious polarization—not only in America but also in Israel—discourage the kinds of efforts that once made the creative work of the Synagogue Council, the National Jewish Welfare Board, the Denver *Bet Din*, and so many other jointly sponsored Jewish religious activities possible. In recent years, many collaborative efforts, not just his, have foundered on the shoals of “principled opposition” from those who would delegitimize all Jewish religious movements

except their own. Should the Conservative movement, with its historic concern for *klal yisrael* (what Solomon Schechter called “Catholic Israel”), continue to exert itself in this area, even in the absence of a shared consensus that such collaboration is beneficial? Should it, in other ways, continue to hew to its traditional ideals regardless of what others think or do? In confronting the Conservative movement’s problems, these are the kinds of difficult questions that Rabbi Zelizer and his successors at the Rabbinical Assembly will need carefully to ponder.

A second problem that Rabbi Zelizer’s article forcefully points to is the problem of setting *boundaries*, the inevitable but never easy task of deciding who is in and who is out. Both Reform and Orthodox Judaism have faced this same problem recently; witness the Union of American Hebrew Congregation’s refusal to admit into the body of Reform Jewish congregations a Humanistic congregation that omitted God from its liturgy, and the Rabbinical Council of America’s expulsion of two rabbis closely linked with the Union for Traditional Judaism. Both decisions stirred controversy; in the process, however, they helped Reform and Orthodox Judaism define for themselves what they are—in part by clarifying what they are not.

Conservative Judaism faces the same boundary challenges, never more so than in confronting the issues that Rabbi Zelizer terms “the sexual agenda.” Having largely followed Reform and Reconstructionism on women’s issues, it must now carefully delineate for its members what still sets it apart from these movements; the *mehitza* dividing Conservative from Orthodox Judaism, by contrast, is relatively well defined. Chancellor Ismar Schorsch has long been concerned with this problem, and his revealing statement to Rabbi Zelizer—“There is no need for a second Reform Judaism in America”—makes this concern manifest. Perhaps Conservative Judaism’s losses in recent years, coupled with the finding that 26 percent of Reform Jews were raised Conservative,⁹ suggests to him that Conservative Judaism’s left-most boundary has become far too permeable.

To be sure, the Rabbinical Assembly has set forth three binding standards meant to distinguish Conservative rabbis from their Reform counterparts: the ban on Conservative rabbis participating in intermarriages, the stress on a matrilineal definition of Judaism as opposed to Reform’s embrace of patrilineality, and the requirement of a *get* prior to the remarriage of a divorcee. Many Conservative congregations, moreover, differ from their Reform counterparts in obvious ritual ways. The two movements are, nevertheless, often confused with one another in Israel (where the Orthodox establishment treats them more or less alike), and a small but significant number of Conservative congregations are headed by Reform-trained rabbis. Where Reform congregations have become more traditional and their Conservative counterparts less so, the line between them has become particularly blurry. There is thus a great need to reset what Rabbi Zelizer calls “the boundaries of authentic Judaism as defined by Conservative Judaism.” The movement cannot win old adherents back until it makes clear what kind of Judaism it hopes to win them back to.

A third problem that Rabbi Zelizer brings to the fore is the problem of *authority* in Conservative Judaism. He properly points out that traditional hierarchies within the movement have, in recent years, been effectively challenged. The strict hierarchy that once characterized the Jewish Theological Seminary (and was reflected in the pattern of seating within the Seminary synagogue) has collapsed. The paternalistic relationship between the Seminary and its rabbis has been

redefined. And the authority of the rabbi vis-à-vis other Jewish professionals within the synagogue (the cantor, the educator, etc.) and vis-à-vis the congregation as a whole is now increasingly called into question.

In part this reflects the changing role of halakhah within the movement. When halakhah stood at the center of Conservative Judaism, the greatest exponent of Jewish law both within the Seminary and in each congregation commanded complete religious authority. As the role of halakha declined, and difficult questions like women's ordination and "homosexual egalitarianism" met with a variety of conflicting halakhic answers, the authority of the halakhic exponent inevitably slackened. Now that the image has been fixed of the Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly deciding controversial halakhic issues on a democratic basis, congregations naturally wonder why they cannot do the same.

To a far greater extent, however, the problem of authority within Conservative Judaism reflects a tension inherent in American religion itself. Anticlericalism is deeply rooted in America's religious tradition and has a long history in American Judaism as well. Congregational autonomy, including in many cases the right to govern the minister, became the pattern in most Protestant churches, and characterized American Judaism from the very beginning. The professionalization of the rabbinate in the late-nineteenth century coupled with the fact that the demand for well-trained English-speaking rabbis far outstripped their supply raised the status of twentieth-century American rabbis and enhanced their authority. The Conservative movement, influenced both by East European norms and by the hierarchic Anglican structure that Solomon Schechter learned to respect in England, proved particularly successful in empowering its rabbis. Congregations, however, never relinquished their legal autonomy.

Today with professionals of all sorts (doctors, professors, etc.) facing limitations on their authority, with congregants better educated than ever before, and with burgeoning financial pressures, lay leaders are looking to take power back into their own hands. Akin to corporate trustees, some even claim a fiduciary responsibility to balance the budget and keep customers (i.e., members) happy. The issue that Rabbi Zelizer focuses upon, the rabbi's status as *mara d'atra*, should thus be seen as a symptom of something much larger. The real question is how to balance all the conflicting demands of different groups within Conservative Judaism, and how to redistribute power now that the movement's traditional hierarchic structure of authority has eroded.

This same crisis of authority may also explain the problems Rabbi Zelizer experienced when he sought to reassert the Rabbinical Assembly's presence in national Jewish politics. He implies that rabbis, as guardians of Torah, should play a "primary" role in this area, presumably on the model of the Catholic bishops or the Council of Sages in Israel. Lay leaders, he laments, usually offer them only symbolic tokens of authority and keep to their own counsel. Much of this plaint sounds familiar, but something should be said concerning America's tradition of church-state separation. More than Rabbi Zelizer is willing to admit, it would seem to discourage active political involvement on the part of a rabbinic organization, although nothing prevents rabbis from speaking out collectively and working as individuals for political ends.

Rabbi Zelizer's paper points up one additional problem plaguing Conservative Judaism and it may be the most sensitive of all—the movement's problematic

public message. The “sexual agenda,” lay-rabbinic relations, national Jewish politics, and “Jewish ecumenicism” may all be significant issues, but if, as Rabbi Zelizer states, they “illustrate the direction of the movement at the approach of the new century,” then Conservative Judaism has decided to project an image of itself far removed from the way it has traditionally been known, and farther still from the central concerns of many congregants. One need only contrast this contemporary agenda with the public face of the Rabbinical Assembly as reflected in its constitution of 1928 to see how much has changed:

The object of the Assembly shall be to promote traditional Judaism, to advance the cause of Jewish learning and to cooperate with the Jewish Theological Seminary and the United Synagogue of America in the furtherance of these aims, and to foster the spirit of fellowship among the rabbis and other Jewish scholars of America.¹⁰

Rabbi Zelizer’s agenda has no bearing on any of these goals, and makes no demands on Conservative Jews whatsoever. Tradition, education, social justice, even the issues subsumed under the rubric of “Jewish continuity” receive scarcely a mention.¹¹ Since it is well known that Conservative rabbis in the field, and certainly Rabbi Zelizer himself, *are* deeply concerned with these “bread and butter” issues—indeed, on a daily basis—the decision to focus the energies and public face of the Rabbinical Assembly in other directions is particularly surprising. It also is deeply problematic, for the chasm between the contemporary public message of Conservative Judaism, the movement’s historical legacy, and reality as seen from the pews raises grave questions concerning the Conservative movement’s direction and ongoing religious mission.

As a movement in flux, the Conservative movement should recall that both Reform and Orthodox Judaism in America successfully reinvented themselves in the twentieth century, emerging from decades of crisis with renewed vigor and stronger in numbers than even the most optimistic of scholars would once have predicted. Now it is Conservative Judaism that must reinvent itself, and Rabbi Zelizer’s illuminating paper points to some of the challenges that must be confronted along the way. One hopes that Rabbi Alan Silverstein, Rabbi Zelizer’s successor as president of the Rabbinical Assembly and one of the Conservative movement’s most dynamic young leaders, will successfully meet these challenges. We look forward to his report two years hence.

NOTES

1. Barry Kosmin *et al.*, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1991), pp. 32–33.
2. Fred Massarik, ed., *Jewish Identity: Facts for Planning - National Jewish Population Study* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1974), p. 2; note that a breakdown of the figures by age found Conservative Judaism outpacing Reform in every age group.
3. Bethamie Horowitz, *The 1991 New York Jewish Population Study* (New York: UJA-Federation, 1993), p. 50.
4. Jack Wertheimer, “Recent Trends in American Judaism,” *American Jewish Year Book* 89 (1989), p. 78.

5. Sidney Goldstein, "Profile of American Jewry: Insights from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey," *American Jewish Year Book* 92 (1992), p. 170.
6. Charles S. Liebman and Saul Shapiro, "A Survey of the Conservative Movement and Some of its Religious Attitudes" (typescript, 1979), p. 22.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
8. See, for example, Peter Novick's review of this period in *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 320–360.
9. Kosmin, *Highlights of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey*, p. 33; Goldstein, "Profile of American Jewry," p. 171. The small discrepancy between the numbers presented in these two sources, based on the same data set, is surprising but insignificant.
10. As quoted in Pamela S. Nadell, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 301.
11. To be fair, Rabbi Zelizer (see his text at fn. 4) does cite Chancellor Ismar Schorsch's address, "Marching to the Wrong Drummer," that dissents from this RA agenda, but he does not engage it.

JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT

"THE AMERICAN RABBI OF THE PRESENT GENERATION IS called upon to cope with many phases of congregational and communal activity which do not seem to belong to the traditional sphere of the Rabbinate," noted a contemporary eyewitness in 1927, referring to the seemingly endless round of brotherhood breakfasts, sisterhood teas, ecumenical luncheons and "a thousand other duties" that filled the modern rabbi's calendar.¹ As much a profession as a calling (*beruf*), the American rabbinate, it seems, had come to be fueled more by organizational skill than by inspiration.

In fact, when it came to a successful rabbinic career, inspiration was hardly fuel enough. "Inspiration cannot furnish the guidance which is necessary in dealing with the problems which the Rabbi encounters in the practice of his ministry," explained one veteran rabbi, calling for "experiential observations."² Toward that end, the interdenominational New York Board of Jewish Ministers convened a series of monthly discussions in 1925 and 1926 at which metropolitan area rabbis frankly discussed the "problems of the Jewish Ministry." Representatives of some of the city's most prestigious congregations, sharing experiences and trading war stories, held forth on ways to "manufacture a sermon," attract adolescents, run a Hebrew School and comfort the bereaved.³

Although these rabbinic gatherings took place more than half a century ago, many of the issues brought to the conference table still resonate today as a latter-

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day generation of American rabbis continues to grapple with the limits and possibilities of what former Rabbinical Assembly president Gerald Zelizer calls "American religious Judaism." Admittedly, in the course of his tenure Rabbi Zelizer grappled with a range of issues, from sexuality to politics, virtually unprecedented in modern Jewish times. And yet, not surprisingly, one of the most nettlesome matters he and his Rabbinical Assembly colleagues had to face—that of rabbinic authority—has the *yichus* of history behind it.

The formal, institutional relationship between the rabbi and his or her congregants recently came to the fore as the Rabbinical Assembly joined together with the United Synagogue to formulate the terms of a new model contract between a prospective rabbi and his congregation. The United Synagogue upheld the primacy of the laity, insisting that its representatives "in consultation with the Rabbi" could institute changes in synagogal "rituals, rites and customs." The Rabbinical Assembly under Zelizer's leadership took strong exception to this provision, upholding the primacy of the local rabbi, the *mara d'atra*. "I defended the principle of *mara d'atra* so doggedly," Zelizer explains, "because the shifting of religious authority away from the rabbi to the layperson would result in Halakhah being based on whim and feelings rather than learning and knowledge of Torah." To date, the issue remains unresolved—and the contract unfinished.

To be sure, the entangled and often fraught relationship between the "shepherd and his flock" seems to be endemic to American religious life.⁴ Colonial Americans, for example, treated their clergymen with so marked a show of parsimony that the renowned Puritan divine Reverend Increase Mather was heard to complain "there is nothing cheap in New England besides milk and ministers."⁵ With the passage of time and Puritanism, tensions hardened rather than softened. Religious etiquette manuals such as Samuel Miller's 1835 *Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits* make clear the extent of its intractability. "Never converse on subjects of this kind, unless it becomes absolutely necessary," Reverend Miller advised his students at the Princeton Theological Seminary, referring to "salary and perquisites." If you must have a conversation, he added, "let it be done sparingly, and with a few confidential friends only."⁶

Rabbinic-lay relations, in turn, foundered not only on money or what one rabbi called "the very vexed question of ministerial perquisites," but, more pointedly still, on ritual matters.⁷ One need only think of that singular American Jewish invention, the synagogue ritual committee, to realize how fully the American Jewish laity sought to, and often succeeded at, exercising religious authority. In many congregations throughout the country, *shnuddering* (the public auctioning of communal honors) was first eliminated, bat-mitzvah celebrations inaugurated, and aliyot granted to women, at the behest and initiative of the ritual committee.

What makes the laity's assumption of religious authority more startling still, especially when considered historically, is its relatively low level of cultural literacy. "It is not probable that we shall ever develop in America the type of layman so common in some of the older European Jewries, notably in Lithuania and Russia, who without being professionally a Rabbi, had the learning of a Rabbi," Rabbi Louis Finkelstein observed in the 1920s. "The only type of learning which we can hope for in American Jewry among the laymen," he predicted, "is of the most popular kind."⁸ In America, though, the absence of a learned laity turned out to be less of a liability than Finkelstein might have thought. Amid the unusual,

“idiosyncratic” conditions of the New World, where democracy was king, rabbis—then, as now—could not expect much by way of congregational fealty.

As Rabbi Zelizer looks back on his tenure as president of the Rabbinical Assembly, perhaps he and his colleagues can take heart from the knowledge that they stand in a long line of distinguished rabbinic personalities at once inspired and vexed by the challenges of American Jewish congregational life. As Rabbi Samuel Schulman put it, way back in 1927, a person “who is afraid has no place in the Jewish pulpit. For the pulpit is not the place in which to give literary essays. It is the place from which to bring a living message to men and women on their various duties in life.”⁹

NOTES

1. New York Board of Jewish Ministers, *Problems of the Jewish Ministry* (New York, 1927), preface.
2. *Ibid.*, preface.
3. *Problems*, p. 1.
4. *Problems*, p. 44.
5. Quoted in Increase Mather, *A Discourse Concerning the Maintenance Due to Those that Preach the Gospel* (Boston, 1706), p. 11.
6. Samuel Miller, *Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits: Addressed to a Student in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey* (Princeton, 1835, third edition), p. 360.
7. *Problems*, p. 53.
8. *Problems*, p. 167.
9. *Problems*, p. 13.

HENRY FEINGOLD

RABBI ZELIZER, WHO MANY YEARS AGO WAS A STUDENT OF mine at the Jewish Theological Seminary, asked me to comment on his essay and I, perhaps foolishly, agreed to do so. I say foolishly because in some sense his essay concerns a family quarrel in which one mixes in at one's own risk. The Conservative movement is like a ship pounded by wave after wave of problems generated by the storm of modernity. I am merely a sympathetic witness who wonders if it

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can survive such a battering. I confine my thoughts to the conflict concerning the determination of the boundaries of human sexuality, whose latest manifestation concerns the question of homosexual rabbis.

I need first to identify myself. I am a former president of the Labor Zionist Alliance, who specializes in the history of American Jewry primarily in the interwar period. I have no difficulty with *frumkeit* which is also in my family background. In fact I am a conservative on religious matters, with a small "c." I agreed with few of the positions taken in the latest Papal encyclical but I was actually relieved to discover that the Pope had not succumbed to ethical relativism. He was exactly where I expect him to be. I believe that in matters of faith some constancy is necessary. Unlike political ideology, religious ideology loses its appeal if it becomes too plastic, especially on matters of principle. The faithful look to it for truth whose harbinger is eternity. A faith that must be adjusted to meet the needs of the times is a contradiction in terms. But that is precisely the crucible of the Conservative movement, which more than the other branches serves as the arena in which the never-ending demands of modernity confront the imperatives of tradition as embodied in Jewish law. We can be fairly certain how the Reform movement and the Orthodox will respond to the prospect of gay rabbis in the pulpit. But the Conservative response is unpredictable or predictably uncertain. That is a sign of both its strength and its weakness.

The demands of modernity are never-ending, especially in the sphere of human sexuality where there is indeed a necessary suppression. Freud tells us it is the price we pay for civilization. Yesterday it was the *agunah* problem and the ordination of women, today it is the gay rabbi, tomorrow it may be the "child lover." It goes on until all groups are liberated. Liberation is the goal of modernity which it achieves in the political realm through liberalism, its secular political instrument. It seeks the latest inequity and puts it on the political agenda to become grist for the civilized conflict which is politics in the parliamentary democracies.

Under other circumstances, Rabbi Zelizer's tactics in the Rabbinic Assembly to circumvent the problem might have been effective. There can be study commissions, all manner of parliamentary tactics and always the reasoning of an engaged heart to solve the problem without bloodshed. But ultimately such problems cannot be finessed, they always surface again and behind them there are other "inequities" awaiting justice to be done. Rabbi Zelizer is a problem-solver but this problem has no solution within the present parameters of the Conservative movement. The challenge it poses to accepted tradition and law is clear, as is its potential for ripping the fabric of the Conservative movement. Clearly Chancellor Schorsch has seen that and moved to protect the institution.

I offer the following observation as a student of America's "hard" secularism and as one who appreciates the importance of maintaining the mediating role of the Conservative movement. There is a distinction between public and private at the heart of modern secularism that might prove useful to the leaders of the Conservative movement, though its use for muting the conflict between the modern and traditional entails the acceptance of a contracted influence over the adherents of the Conservative movement and the thousands of other Jews who find comfort in the path it has chosen in the past.

What most clashes with the sense of autonomy and freeness cherished by moderns is the need of the synagogue or church to intervene into the spiritual and

therefore private lives of its adherents. Understandably the Hasidic rebbe who intercedes deeply into the life of his followers is jarring to the secular person who feels that he must be free, self-governing in order to fulfill his potential. It is no less problematic when the Orthodox or Conservative branches attempt to dictate private behavior. Everywhere we see this distinction between the private and the public sphere upheld. Prohibiting abortions would be such an intrusion by the government, as would prayer in the schools. Religion in America is in the private sphere. When one impinges on it the institution inevitably is the loser. The symptom is a growing burden of fiat and laws that are ignored. Such laws, whether they are legislated by the Vatican or the Rabbinic Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, are unenforceable and become monuments to the impotence of the institution. They are like the pronunciamientos of the governments of the banana republics of Latin America. One might well wonder what sense there is in protecting such signals of weakness. Would it not be wiser to recognize that the modern distinction between the private and public spheres is pervasive and irreversible?

It would be recognizing what in fact already exists and it is precisely in the second realm of *mara d'atra*, where the local rabbi is the halakhic authority, that allows such a policy of avoidance to flourish. The question of the gayness of a candidate for the pulpit need never come up unless the local congregation insists upon it. It would be a Conservative version of "Don't ask, don't tell."

Surely Rabbi Zelizer is correct in noting that his tenure as president of the Rabbinic Assembly corresponds to one of the most vital periods in the history of the Conservative movement. The conflicts it continually hosts is evidence that Conservatism, more than the other branches, continues to be at the cutting edge of the inherent tension between the forces of tradition and change. Still, if the crucial question is one of movement survival, one needs to ask if it is not too much engaged. How often can one risk splitting the movement before it actually happens?

Clearly what is needed is an instrument or policy that permits its leadership to select the battle it chooses to wage so that it is not wracked by every conflict inherent in the agenda of moderns. It needs to call its own shots. That could be achieved by making a concession to modernity, one which has in fact already been made at the grass roots. The Rabbinic Assembly and its Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards ought to avoid legislating or dealing with "private" matters like the gender and sexuality of its rabbis, and confine its fiat to the public realm, what its adherents must deal with outside the bedroom.

The distinction between private and public is a core value for moderns; it is where freedom is located. Even observant Conservative Jews cannot simply be ordered to obey. Yet it is a problematic concession because a community of faithful cannot lightly abandon the right to intervene to make men better or holier. Probably all contemporary churches will have to employ this strategy until such times as behavioral mandates will again become acceptable, as they surely will, since some fraction of the population needs them to live full and productive lives.

The Golem, Zevi Ashkenazi, and Reproductive Biotechnology

BYRON L. SHERWIN

STUNNING DEVELOPMENTS IN BIOTECHNOLOGY CONTINUE to precipitate challenging problems for bioethics. For instance, the application of biotechnology to human reproduction has raised a plethora of problems for bioethics. Of these, two are paramount:

1. What constitutes the “artificial” creation of human life?
2. What constitutes the creation of “artificial” life?

The first question relates to methodology, that is, to the employment of certain procedures to engender life—including human life, “artificially.” The second question relates to the legal status of an entity brought into existence through the employment of such procedures.

With the birth in Britain in 1978 of a child “conceived” *in vitro*, the implications of reproductive biotechnology for bioethics and public policy came to the fore. Subsequent developments have raised a host of additional ethical issues. Such developments include, for example, artificial embryonization, the storage and use of frozen embryos, embryo “transfers,” and related procedures currently being practiced. As fantasies previously in the provenance of science fiction increasingly become actual procedures of biotechnology, additional items will inevitably supplement the menu of current bioethical issues.

Many developments in reproductive biotechnology have been stimulated and accelerated by patients’ demands for the treatment of infertility. A growing number of affluent fertility patients in Western countries has created an unprecedented demand for the use of reproductive biotechnologies.¹ Deferral of childbearing by couples seeking to establish themselves professionally before beginning a family, difficulties in achieving conception because of the long-term use of various contraceptive devices, excessive stress, exposure to various types of radiation, and a sudden alertness to the ticking of the “biological clock,” have led to a precipitous increase in individuals seeking medical treatment for infertility. It is reasonable to assume—on the basis of available demographic and socioeconomic data, that a disproportionately large number of such individuals are Jews. Consequently, the utilization of reproductive biotechnological procedures is an issue of particular concern to

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the Jewish community from a demographic and sociological perspective. However, this issue is also important from an ethical and halakhic perspective.

Jewish scholars working in the field of bioethics have responded to the ethical and legal implications of developments in reproductive biotechnology with startling erudition, sophisticated reasoning, and the creative application of ancient and medieval sources to both current and anticipated problems. Both Jews and non-Jews have expressed a growing appreciation of the wealth of resources and the ingenuity of methods of argument characteristic of the Jewish ethical and legal tradition as applied to current problems in bioethics.

My purpose here is not to review or to evaluate the views of contemporary Jewish scholars on the ethical implications of developments in reproductive biotechnology. Rather my aim is to suggest the applicability of classical Jewish sources about the Golem to certain issues in bioethics that intersect with developments in reproductive biotechnology. This link between the Golem and the ethical implications of reproductive biotechnology has largely been ignored by bioethicists. However, the forging of this link and the exploration of some of its implications may provide an alternate perspective on, and the basis for a new approach to many bioethical issues. Precisely because the Golem is usually consigned to the realm of fantasy and imagination, its halakhic implications often are overlooked. But, the Golem has been taken seriously by past generations of talmudists and halakhists. Our generation cannot take the Golem any less seriously than they did.²

The intersection of bioethics and reproductive biotechnology inevitably leads, as I noted earlier, to a consideration of the legal status of "artificial" persons. The application of "ordinary language" analysis to Anglo-American legal texts reveals a distinction between "natural" persons and "artificial" persons as well as a distinction between "natural" and "artificial" methods of engendering human life.³ One example of an "artificial" person offered by Anglo-American law is a corporation. One may ask what is the essential difference between a natural and an artificial person?⁴ Both have rights and duties. While legally there may be little if any distinction, theologically there is a vital distinction.⁵ An "artificial person," e.g., a corporation, is a "corpus," a "body" without a soul. A "natural person" is a human being, i.e., a body with a soul.⁶

Jewish law, which focuses upon the obligations of human beings, does not seem to recognize the category of "artificial persons" so readily accepted by Anglo-American legal tradition. For example, Jewish law tends to treat a corporation as a partnership among natural persons, rather than considering it as a discrete legal entity, i.e., as an "artificial" person in and of itself. One may query whether the category of an "artificial person" is found in Jewish law; if so, how does Jewish law deal with this category; and, how does Jewish law's treatment of this category differ from that found in Anglo-American law?

Let me suggest that Jewish law indeed does include the category of "artificial person"; the term used to denote this category is "Golem." A Golem is an "artificial person" both because of the method of its creation and because

of its defined legal status as being somehow distinct from “natural persons,” i.e., from human beings. Like the corporation, the Golem is a living, existing “corpus,” i.e., a body without a soul. But, does the Golem, as an “artificial person,” have the same obligations, rights, and status as a natural person as in Anglo-American jurisprudential tradition; or, is the status of an “artificial person” in Jewish law different from the one enjoyed by such beings in Anglo-American law? Further, what might be the implications of the status of a Golem in Jewish law with regard to various issues in reproductive biotechnology?

One place to look for help in dealing with these questions is a text found among the responsa of Zevi Ashkenazi. In this text, Ashkenazi treats the status of a Golem. Specifically, Ashkenazi poses two questions: Can a Golem be counted in a *minyan*; is killing a Golem murder? In a general sense, these two questions are one: What is the legal status of a Golem? What obligations and protections of law does this status imply?

Ashkenazi’s responsum reads as follows:

I became doubtful [concerning the resolution of the following question]: Is [the case of] a man, created by [means of magically employing] the *Sefer Yetzirah* identical [to the case] reported in the *Tractate Sanhedrin*?⁷⁷ Namely, “Rabbah created a man [and sent him to Rabbi Zera. Rabbi Zera spoke to him but received no answer. Thereupon he said to him—“You are a creature of magicians. Return to your dust.”] So it has also been asserted concerning my ancestor, the Gaon, our Master and Teacher, Rabbi Elijah, chief rabbi of the Holy Community of Chelm. Who is allowed to be counted as one of ten [a quorum for prayer] in matters which require ten, i.e., [recitation of such prayers as] *Kaddish*, *Kedushah*, for it is written, “I [God] will be sanctified amidst Israel”? Do we include [such an individual as the artificially created man] or do we say that since it is taught in *Sanhedrin*, “He who raises an orphan in his home, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had begotten him”? For it is written “Five sons of Michal, the daughter of Saul whom she bore to Adriel” [2 Sam. 21:8]. “Did not Merab bear them? Yes, but Michal raised them [and they are therefore called her sons].”⁷⁸ In the present case as well [the artificially created man is considered a child of the one who created him; therefore a regular human being; therefore he can be counted].

Since the workings of the hands of the righteous is involved, he is to be included, for the works of the hands of the righteous are their progeny.⁷⁹ [So far, he is included.]

But it seems to me that as a result of meeting Rabbi Zera who said: “You are the work of magicians, return to your dust,” he was killed. And do you not think that if there would have been a need to include him amongst a quorum that Rabbi Zera would have “cast him from the world”?

[It thus appears that] there is no prohibition of murder concerning him. [Otherwise Rabbi Zera would be guilty of murder.] For Scripture remarks—and I know there are other possible explanations: “Whosoever sheds a *man*’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed [for in the image of God made He man,” Gen. 9:5.] [That is to say,] only a *man* formed within a human being; that is, only [killing one who was] a fetus formed within his mother’s womb [is counted as murder]. Nevertheless, since he [the artificially created man] has a purpose, he [Rabbi Zera]

should not have cast him out of existence. But it is certain that he [the artificially created man] is not counted amongst the ten needed for holy deeds.¹⁰

According to Ashkenazi, a Golem is to be excluded from those qualifying to constitute a quorum for prayer, and, killing a Golem is not considered murder because murder relates only to “a human person formed within a human being, i.e., [one who was] a fetus formed within his mother’s womb.” However, though killing a Golem is not murder, according to Ashkenazi, such an act when performed without justification, carries with it certain liabilities and legal exposure.

A conclusion, similar to that of Ashkenazi, was reached by Isaiah Horowitz. Horowitz claims that no illicit sexual act (e.g., rape, incest) can be committed between a human person and a Golem (or between two Golems) because a Golem does not have the status of a “person” under Jewish law.¹¹

From a consideration of these sources (i.e., Ashkenazi and Horowitz), it would seem that Jewish law accepts the category of an “artificial person,” but refuses to afford it the same status granted by Anglo-American legal tradition. For Jewish law, it would appear, only a human being formed within his or her mother’s womb is a natural person; however, beings—formed artificially, though of human appearance—do not share the status or the obligations of a natural person. This position poses two questions:

1. Can we take Ashkenazi’s and Horowitz’s views as the final word on the subject, i.e., can a Golem ever have the legal status of human personhood?
2. What relevance does their exclusion of “artificially” created beings from human personhood have for ethical issues of reproductive biotechnology today?

According to various *midrashim*, a Golem does not have the *actual* status of human personhood, but does have the status of *potential* human personhood.¹² The assumption here is that if and when a Golem evolves into humanhood, it, in effect, acquires and enjoys the status of a natural human person.

A number of sources link the status of the Golem to the method and to the moral character of its “creator.” Unlike a number of Christian sources where the creation of a homunculus was identified with the satanic force,¹³ Jewish sources endorsed the propriety of the artificial creation of life as an act of *imitatio Dei* and as an experience of mystical rapture. In the Jewish view, moral as well as technological prerequisites are required of an individual undertaking the task of the artificial creation of life.¹⁴ This insistence upon a moral requirement, as well as technological skill, has much to say to contemporary activities in biotechnology.

The question as to whether a Golem can attain the legal status of a “person” is debated by the halakhic sources. Three positions on this issue emerge. The first is that, by definition, a Golem cannot be considered a “person”;¹⁵ a Golem has the status of property or of an animal, or of an animal which is someone’s property.¹⁶ The second position is that a Golem is an “artificial person,” but it

nonetheless lacks the status of a “natural person.” In this view, “Golem” is a discrete legal category that cannot be subsumed under other established legal categories. The third position maintains that a Golem that possesses essential human characteristics is a human being, that is, a “natural person” in every respect, and therefore has the status of a human being. In this view, the only significant distinction between such a Golem and other “natural persons” relates to the methods by means of which such an individual came into being. According to this third approach, a Golem with the status of a human being is not an “artificial person,” but rather a “natural person” who was brought into existence through other than usual means. During the process of creation such an entity may be an “artificial person,” a human *in potentia*, but once “born,” and once its essential human traits are evident, such an “artificial person” is granted the status of a “natural person” in all respects.¹⁷

The Golem is denied the status of a “person” because it lacks some essential human characteristic. However, according to some sources, a Golem that has all essential human characteristics, may be considered a human person. For example, the hasidic master, Gershon Hanokh Leiner of Radzyn affirms Ashkenazi’s opinion. But, as Gershon Hanokh explains, this is because the Golem to which Ashkenazi refers lacked essential human traits. However, if a Golem has essential human traits, continues Gershon Hanokh, it would not be a Golem at all, but would enjoy the status of a natural person.¹⁸

Rather than assume that each of these approaches is mutually exclusive, we can consider them as mutually inclusive: each may be applied to a particular stage in a specific process of reproductive biotechnology, such as *in vitro* fertilization. Let us now consider how this may be so.

In 1978, shortly after the birth of the first “test-tube baby,” Judah Gershuni discussed the implications of *in vitro* fertilization from a halakhic perspective. While most of his discussion focuses upon the question of the permissibility of masturbation on the part of the sperm donor, Gershuni—almost as an afterthought, briefly draws an analogy between the “test-tube baby” and the Golem, with specific reference to the responsum of Zevi Ashkenazi. The basis of this analogy is that the “test-tube baby,” like the Golem, is not conceived *in vivo*.¹⁹ This observation asks one to consider how the various steps in this process—from conception to birth—are linked to halakhic and theological implications of the Golem.

In modern Hebrew, the word *golem* means “cocoon.”²⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that in medieval Hebrew, one meaning of the word *golem* is “embryo.”²¹ In at least one medieval text, *golem* denotes not simply a fertilized ovum, but an embryo with distinct identifiable limbs.²² Furthermore, considering an “artificially” created embryo as having the status of a Golem, can serve as a basis for the adjudication of cases relating to the status and to the disposition of such entities. One such example is the Tennessee case of *Davis v. Davis* where the disposition of frozen embryos had to be decided as part of a property settlement in a divorce case.

In the initial trial, the judge framed the issue in terms of whether the embryos were human beings or property. Since the judge could not accept their designation as property, he ruled that the “children” are human beings.²³

This decision provoked extensive discussion among bioethicists. One prominent American bioethicist maintained that the judge was incorrect in framing the issue in terms of whether embryos are “people or products.” He recommends (as do others) placing embryos in a third category altogether. However, he does not define the status of beings in such a category.²⁴ In contrast, writing a number of years before the Davis case, a leading American authority on the legal implications of reproductive biotechnology maintained that in order legally to protect and to ensure the rights of individuals (i.e., sperm and egg “donors”), “extracorporeal body parts” must be considered as the property of the individuals who provide them.²⁵

From Ashkenazi’s responsum, it is clear that a Golem cannot be considered to be a “natural person.” Consequently, destroying a Golem is not murder. Hence, destroying a frozen embryo, or aborting (even a viable) embryo conceived *in vitro* though gestated *in vivo*, would not be murder, as some suggest. These include advocates of a “pro-life” position who identify the attainment of human personhood with ensoulment at conception.²⁶ Furthermore, according to some Jewish sources, while destruction of a human embryo is not an act of murder for Jews, it may be considered an act of murder for non-Jews, i.e., for Noahides.²⁷ The identification of the embryo with the Golem may be a way of circumventing the equation of destruction of an embryo with murder as far as non-Jews are concerned.

Despite Ashkenazi’s refusal to consider destroying a Golem to be murder, he nonetheless claims that such an action is not without some liability. The question left open by Ashkenazi is the nature of such liability. One possibility, as discussed above, is that one is liable for the destruction of property. A second possibility recommended by Ashkenazi’s son, Jacob Emden, is that a Golem is “just like an animal in the form of a man.”²⁸ Hence, destroying a Golem with purpose might be compared to the justifiable act of killing an animal, while destroying a Golem without any reason would be analogous to an unjustified act of killing an animal. To this observation, one may add that since animals may be a variety of property, the two categories of “property” and “animal” might be collapsed into one insofar as liability is concerned.²⁹

The identity of Golem and human embryo may lead one to conclude that certainly until birth, such a being is not a “person,” and does not enjoy the legal protections afforded human personhood. However, can such a “Golem” subsequently, i.e., at birth, be considered a “person”? Put another way: can an “artificial person” (i.e., a Golem) attain the status of a “person” in Jewish law?

Here one can utilize the precedent established by Gershon Hanokh Leiner that though brought into being through the employment of “artificial” means, once “born” a Golem who is human in every respect (and not just in appearance) is no longer a Golem at all, but a human being. Hence, since a person conceived

“artificially” is indistinguishable at birth from other human beings, such an individual would have every claim on human personhood. Like Adam (according to various *midrashim*), who progressed from a golemic to a human status, such an individual would be no less human than Adam or any other human being. In fact, as Leiner claims, if Ashkenazi’s criteria were applied to the first human being, i.e., Adam, then Adam—who was created in a manner different from other human beings, could “legally” have been murdered. Since such a conclusion is patently absurd, Leiner concludes that the nature of the individual, rather than the “process” by means of which that individual was conceived and gestated, is the critical factor in determining human personhood.

Is it appropriate, we may then ask, to apply the term “artificial” to an individual conceived and gestated (or even birthed) through “artificial” means? As the legendary creator of the Golem, Judah Loew of Prague states, the process of the creation of a Golem is not actually done through artificial means, because the method of creating a Golem is not outside “the natural order.”³⁰ A similar view, with reference to genetic engineering, was reached by the (U.S.) President’s Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine: “The basic processes underlying genetic engineering are natural and not revolutionary.”³¹ This view might also be applied to developments in reproductive biotechnology.

As one may question the propriety of using the term “artificial” within the context of reproductive biotechnology, so may one question the appropriateness of the use of the term “creation.” The successful employment of current methods of reproductive biotechnology do not actually “create” life. Rather, they serve as agents to help engender new life. The creation of life by human beings is yet to occur.³²

From the preceding, we may conclude that the application of Jewish sources about the Golem to a wide variety of issues in reproductive biotechnology offers a “window of opportunity” for applying old texts to new problems in bioethics and human identity.³³ These include not only current procedures such as *in vitro* fertilization and artificial embryonization, but also anticipated developments in cloning, bionics, and artificial intelligence. In dealing with such issues, the Golem is likely to emerge not as the product of past Jewish fantasies, but as a repository of insight for confronting the bioethical challenges of the present and future.

NOTES

1. The American Fertility Society has estimated that as many as 10,000 embryos are frozen annually in the United States, and that as many as half a million childless couples each year require the help of a third party—either a surrogate mother or a sperm donor or an egg or an embryo donor.

It may also be noted that an international feminist group has been organized to oppose the use of procedures in reproductive biotechnology: FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering). See a critical review of this feminist position in L. Andrews, “Alternative Models of Reproduction,” in N. Taub and S. Cohen, eds., *Reproductive Laws for the 1990s* (Newark, NJ: State University Press, Rutgers, 1989). See also, e.g., the sensitive and balanced discussion of the choice between childlessness and the utilization of reproductive biotechnology by P. Lauritzen, “What Price Parenthood?,” *Hastings Center Report* 20:2 (March/April 1990): 38–46. Certain Christian—especially Catholic—bioethicists consistently

have opposed the utilization of a variety of procedures of reproductive biotechnology on theological grounds related to theologies of “ensoulment” and of family life.

2. Consider, e.g., the following halakhic questions that have been raised: Does a “dead” Golem convey ritual impurity? Can meat from an animal slaughtered by a Golem be considered kosher? Is there any culpability for having illicit sexual relations with a Golem? Is an artificially created animal treated as a “natural animal” insofar as the Jewish dietary laws are concerned? Is creation of a Golem permissible on Shabbat? See e.g., Z. H. Shapira, *Darkhay Teshuvah* (Jerusalem, 1967), vol. 1/2, 38–39, n. 11 on *Shulhan ‘Arukh–Yoreh De’ah* 7:1; B. L. Sherwin, *In Partnership with God: Contemporary Jewish Law and Ethics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 181–209; Moshe Idel, *Golem* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 232–242.

3. On “ordinary language philosophy” developed by philosophers J. L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle, see e.g., V. C. Chappell, ed., *Ordinary Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964).

4. On “natural persons” and “artificial persons” in Anglo-American law, see e.g., H. C. Black, *Black’s Law Dictionary* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1968), s.v. “Person,” 1299–1300; W. Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769; Facsimile edition: Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 119, 455. See also M. J. Phillips, “Corporate Moral Personhood and Three Conceptions of the Corporation,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 2:4 (October 1992): 435–461.

5. For example, Black, 1200, quotes Pollock’s *First Book of Jurisprudence*: “A person is such not because he is human, but because rights and duties are ascribed to him. The person is the legal subject or substance of which the rights and duties are attributes.”

6. See e.g., Black, 1300, quoting *Hogan v. Greenfield* 58 Wyoming 13, 122 P. 2nd 853, “Persons are of two kinds, natural and artificial. A natural person is a human being.”

7. *Sanhedrin* 65b.

8. *Sanhedrin* 19a.

9. See Rashi to Genesis 6:9 based on *Genesis Rabbah* 30:6.

10. Zevi Ashkenazi, *Responsa* [Hebrew] (Amsterdam, 1812), no. 93. Note earlier English translations of this responsum in Sherwin, 200–201; Idel, 217.

11. Isaiah Horowitz, 3 vols., *Shney Lufot ha-Brit* (Jerusalem: Edison, 1960), “*Torah she-Bikhtav*”–“*va-yeyshuv*,” vol. 3, 65a.

12. See e.g., *Sanhedrin* 38b; *Genesis Rabbah* 24:2; *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:1; *Midrash on Psalms* 92:3.

13. According to the legend of Faust, Faust created an artificial person through powers granted by the Devil. According to a Christian legend, Albertus Magnus made an automaton that was destroyed by St. Thomas Aquinas on the grounds that it was the work of the Devil. See e.g., H. Geduld and R. Gottesman, *Robots* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 18.

14. See e.g., Sherwin, 194, 199, 204.

15. See e.g., Judah Loew of Prague, *Hiddushey ‘Aggadot*, 4 vols. (New York: Judaica Press, 1969), vol. 3, 166–167.

16. See, e.g., the view of Ashkenazi’s son, Jacob Emden, *She’eylat Ya’avetz* (Lwow, 1884) part 2, 28a. Note Idel, 199–201, 219–225.

17. See Sherwin, 206–208.

18. G. H. Lainer, *Sidrey Taharot–’Ohalot* (Pytrkow, 1903), 5a.

19. Judah Gershuni, “The First ‘Test-Tube Baby’ in the World in the Light of Jewish Law” [Hebrew], *’Or ha-Mizrah* 27:1 (October 1978): 21.

20. See e.g., A. Even-Shushan, *Ha-Milon he-Hadash*, s.v. “Golem,” vol. 1, 179.

21. I am grateful to Moshe Idel for sharing this insight with me. See Idel, 35, 71, 300. On a kabbalistic text that compares the sperm to the Golem, see Idel, 156 no. 37.

22. Y. David, ed., *Shirey ‘Amitay* (Jerusalem: Achshav, 1975), 16, “The texture of the limbs of the Golem in the womb, when it was formed.” The poet quoted here is ‘Amitai ben Shefatyah, a ninth-century Italian Jew.

23. Davis v. Davis v. King, 5th Jud. Ct., Tennessee E-14496 (September 21, 1989).
24. G. Annas, "A French Homunculus in a Tennessee Court," *Hastings Center Report* 19:6 (December 1989): 20-22.
25. L. B. Andrews, "My Body, My Property," *Hastings Center Report* 16:5 (October 1986): 28-39. See esp. 30, 31, "If body parts are not considered property, there may be little protection for people who entrust their bodily materials to others. . . . In order to give weight to the biological parents' wishes regarding gametes and embryos, the American Fertility Society in its Ethical Statement on *In Vitro* Fertilization, specifically refers to sperm, eggs and embryos as the property of the individuals who provide them." Compare the case in New York of *Del Zio v. Manhattan's Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center*, No. 74-3558 (Southern District, NY, November 14, 1978), where embryos of a couple were destroyed. The couple sued for property damage and for mental stress. Damages for mental stress were granted, but the claim for property damage was virtually dismissed.
26. See the discussion and sources noted in D. M. Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 268-271. Compare the view taken here regarding the permissibility of justifiable destruction of embryos "artificially" created to that of J. D. Bleich, "In Vitro Fertilization: Questions of Maternal Identity and Conversion," *Tradition* 25:4 (Summer 1991): 97.
27. Feldman, 254-262. See also J. D. Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977), 330-339, 367-370, and sources noted there.
28. Emden, 28a.
29. That the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office now grants patents on genetically altered "new" animals indicates that such "artificially" created animals are legally being defined as the property of the holder of the patent. The first such patent was granted to Harvard University in April 1988 for a genetically altered mouse which can be effectively used in testing substances and drugs thought to prevent or to treat cancer in humans. The landmark American case regarding the patenting of genetically engineered organisms was *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* 44 U.S. 303 (1980), decided June 16, 1980 in a 5-to-4 vote by the U. S. Supreme Court. This was a case regarding a "human-made, genetically engineered bacterium capable of breaking down multiple components of crude oil."
30. J. Loew, *Be'er ha-Golah* (New York: Judaica Press, 1969), chap. 2, 27-28. Loew's view that the "creation" of life is within the natural order and therefore permissible by Jewish law, was anticipated by Menahem ha-Meiri in his *Bayt ha-Behirah*, *Sanhedrin*, Abraham Sofer, ed. (Jerusalem: Kedem, 1965), 248 to Sanhedrin 67b.
31. President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine, *Splicing Life: The Special and Ethical Issues of Genetic Engineering with Human Beings* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 31.
32. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to deal with the problem of the nature of life, i.e., of how to define "life," and of the essential qualities that a living being possesses. It may be noted, however, that the "simulated" creation of life has been accomplished by computer science, but this does not constitute the actual creation of life. Even such computer simulation relates to the *duplication* of already existing microorganisms, and not to the creation of life from nothing. Attempts of microbiologists to create a cell are also currently underway. However, this approach relates to the *formation* of a cell from already existing matter, and not to the *creation* of life from nothing, i.e., *ex nihilo*. In this regard, the distinction of medieval Jewish thinkers between *beri'ah* and *yetzirah* is pertinent. *Beri'ah* pertains to creation—*creatio ex nihilo*, and is within the power only of God. In contrast, all human creativity is *yetzirah*, i.e., the "formation" of something new from preexisting entities. Despite the talmudic description of Rabbah "creating" ("bara' ") a man, this was later understood as an act of "formation," not creation, i.e., Rabbah brought the Golem into existence from preexisting elements (including language) created by God, and not "from scratch." Reference to the following midrashic statement is pertinent here: "If all the creatures of the world gathered together to make a single gnat [from scratch] and put a soul into it, they would not succeed." See e.g., *Sifre on Deuteronomy* #32 to Deuteronomy 6:5. On current scientific efforts to "create" life, see e.g., D. H. Freedman, "Playing God," *Discover* 13:8 (August 1992): 35-54.
33. On the Golem, computers, artificial intelligence, and human identity in Jewish law, see e.g., A. Rosenfield, "Religion and the Robot," *Tradition* 8:3 (Fall 1966): 15-26.

Insomnia again

My friend, who is nearing eighty, calls to praise me,
a recent honor, and says, "Posh" and "Fah" to my worries.
"Conflict," she says, "is the source of life.
Without it we wither."

Is that what keeps us keen? Is that what keeps us up
in the night worrying? We have no stomach
for it. I don't say so but reflect, at 2 A.M.,
on someone in the bible, in the fiery furnace,
lean and glistening of muscle. But I forget
his name and story. Did he thrash, did he hurl
himself against the hot, locked door? In these versions
of our torments, we do well to remember the finish line:
He got out. The Lord (praised be his name) sent him a friend
with an uzi. Or, the keeper loved him. In their sweat
was lubrication enough he slithered out a hole in the wall.
He was reborn, a ribbon in air.

My other friend has a friend reborn in water,
who walked into the Charles River and drowned.
She was a poet; she wrote of the flood
in the voice of Nemach, Noah's wife,
in the few years of her recent life.
My friend is sad and thinks of leaving teaching.
I'm drinking Ovaltine, myself, in deepening night.
My children's father's mother recommended it
for tension before a truck ground her into earth,
and lactic acid I've read, is kind to endorphins.
We will be calmed.

Now, so early in the morning custom turns our heads
to the window, we see birds, juncos framed by

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clay pots filled with fern and air-climbing hydrangea.
Baskets of tuberous begonias with flushed double cheeks
and single heads. Fuzz of the soft kind, baby leaves.
Fire, water, earth, air: they're what we've got.
The world will rock us. We go off to bed.

Isaac Stern's Performance

Here plants – gold and dry – rustle up
green at soil's edge.
Music roils in the room
where I wait, my chest holding even
at the scar's edge.

Whatever chances I took
paid off and now I have only
the rest of my life to consider.
Once it was a globe, an ocean
to cross, at least a desert –
now a rivulet, or a blowhole.

"I remember it was like a story,"
Rampal said on the radio.
"He told you the Beethoven concerto."
I am telling you cancer.

I am telling you like moisture
at soil's edge after winter, or
the bulb of the amaryllis you brought
raising stem after stem from cork dirt,
one hybrid flower after another unfurling
for hours, each copper petal opening its throat so
slowly, each shudder of tone – mahogany, coral, blood –
an ache, orgasm, agony, life.

Jacob's Limp

SCHNEIR LEVIN

WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THE NOCTURNAL DISORDER (Genesis 32:25, v. 26 in the Hebrew) that caused Jacob to limp? (v. 31, v. 32) One could study the opinions of the religious scholars or of physicians. Something happened in the hollow of Jacob's thigh, his groin, during his disturbed dream, and the issue depends on how the Hebrew verb *va-tayka* (v. 26) is to be translated. Jacob's dream opponent did something (*tayka*) to the hollow, the groin. What happened? All translators focus on the hip which was:

Hirsch translation	dislocated
Hertz	strained
Fisch	out of joint
Tanakh JPS	wrenched

Non-Jewish translators include:

Septuagint	numbed
Authorized Version	out of joint
New Intern. Version	wrenched
New English (and Revised English Bible)	dislocated

I think all these diagnoses are wrong, but excusable, for none of their authors were physicians, certainly not modern physicians. What then do modern physicians have to say on the topic? I have several books on medicine in the Bible, but only three of them have something to say and, understandably, something medically sensible.

Julius Preuss (1911) writes that there couldn't have been a dislocation of the hip joint, for then Jacob would not have been able to move.¹ Preuss writes that he doesn't know why the hip should have been grabbed during the dream wrestling.

Charles Jacob Brim (1936) doesn't say anything about the nature of the hip-groin injury and focuses rather on the consequence, the hind leg structure, the *gid* (v. 33) which was affected and as a consequence of which the *gid* of an animal might not be eaten. But he claims that the *gid* is not the sciatic nerve—

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“the text does not convey such interpretation”—but could mean regional nerve, blood vessel, tendon, muscle, joint, fascia.² In modern Hebrew *gid* means sinew or tendon.

A longer and better discussion comes from the pen of a Christian surgeon in Bristol, England. Rendle Short (1953) writes, “Here is a man engaged in violent exertion, with his body bent this way and that, who is suddenly incapacitated by acute pain and lameness in ‘the hollow of his thigh,’ and has to limp on the leg afterwards . . . the rendering that the thigh was ‘out of joint’ is on medical grounds very improbable. It takes great violence, such as a railway accident or a fall from a height, to dislocate the hip joint, and if that happened, Jacob would have been unable to stand or walk afterwards. But the description fits very well the modern . . . diagnosis of ruptured intervertebral disc producing severe and intractable sciatica from pressure on the nerve roots. The Hebrews, therefore, would not eat the sciatic nerve of any animal in respect for their ancestor’s memory. Jewish butchers always . . . pull out the sciatic nerves as the *gid*. . . .”³

Of course; this is a sensible explanation of the clinical situation. Tremendous violence is required for a hip to dislocate and that diagnosis is simply out of the question. A back displacement and sciatica is the obvious, and common, diagnosis in such a situation but is, I think, also wrong, and for two reasons: the first is eisegesis, reading back into the text the practice of later times, the removal of the sciatic nerve for the purpose of *kashrut*, hence the inference of sciatica, and secondly, the biblical story doesn’t mention the curve (*caf*) of the *gav*, back, but of the groin.

Why the focus on the hip-groin area during the dream encounter with a wrestling opponent? Because the opponent was Esau; it could have been no other. Here was the denouement, here was Jacob, terrified of meeting his wronged brother with his 400 men on the morrow. What else could he dream about than Esau taking his life or the ultimate humiliation of castration? Jacob had dreamed when he escaped from Esau, and now the reverse occasion demanded another dream, now that he was to meet his nemesis peril face to face. This much has been obvious to others (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 77:3, 78:3). What could be Esau’s dream revenge? Castration? The Hebrew text is curious; it can be interpreted as omitting a critical word. Verse 25 (26 in the Hebrew) reads *vayar ki lo yakhol . . . lo*—and when he saw that he was not able to . . . him, and various translators infer a word (like prevail): could it have been castrate?

In an earlier biblical episode, Cain, feeling that Abel’s sheep had intruded onto his agricultural territory, threatened (implied) Abel to get out. Verse 8 of chapter 4 reads, in the Hebrew, that “Cain said to his brother Abel . . .” but what he said is not stated, only implied. In the same way the biblical redactor has perhaps removed an embarrassing word from the Hebrew of verse 26, which might read *vayar ki lo yakhol lesares lo*—and when he saw that he was not able to castrate him. The word eunuch, from the root *sares*, is

mentioned frequently in the Hebrew Bible. This was Jacob's great fear and the subject of his dream.

Similar notions have crossed other minds. D. E. Fass, a New York rabbi, wisely avoids the medico-surgical aspect of the dream encounter and deals with sexual injury, impotence (though he doesn't consider castration), and psychoanalytic interpretations of the genital focus.⁴

Without doubt then, the injury occurred not in the hollow of Jacob's back but in his groin. Tissues there couldn't have become strained or wrenched. Groin injuries involving the attached tendons and fascia would need considerable wakeful physical violence if there was to be a resultant limp.

But there is another surgical possibility, the obvious one, the common one, which in predisposed males—that is, males with a potentially open passage from the abdomen through the groin and into the scrotum—can result in a *hernia in the groin, most often on the right side, and as a consequence of increased intra-abdominal pressure during the course of a worrying dream*. Such a rupture, a hernia, is often sufficiently uncomfortable, when it occurs, to result in a temporary limp. The debatable word *tayka*, then, is to be interpreted and translated as rupture, which resulted in an inguinal hernia. This must have reduced itself, as happens, or Jacob could have squeezed it back and relieved his distress because verse 18 of chapter 33 reads *vayovo Yaacob shalem ir Shechem*. In the context of his disorder this word *shalem* is better understood as physically restored, with the hernia reduced and his genital organs intact, so that the sentence is better rendered, “And Jacob came physically intact to the city of Shechem.” Bearing in mind the recurrent nature of groin (inguinal) hernia, it is likely that it troubled Jacob from time to time for the rest of his life.

NOTES

1. Julius Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (original in German, 1911), trans. F. Rosner. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1983), p. 237.
2. Charles Jacob Brim, *Medicine in the Bible* (New York: Froben Press, 1936), p. 274.
3. A. Rendle Short, *The Bible and Modern Medicine* (London: Paternoster Press, 1953), p. 60.
4. D. E. Fass, “Jacob's Limp?” *JUDAISM* 38 (1989):143.

Religion and Politics in Israel and Jerusalem

IRA SHARKANSKY

ISRAEL PRESENTS AN INTRIGUING SITE FOR EXAMINING the role of religion in politics. In many respects, it is a polar opposite of the typical Western, secular democracy.¹ Founded as a Jewish state, Israel did not follow the trend that had prevailed for more than a century in Europe and North America; instead, Israel brought religion into the state, though in a complicated way. Nevertheless, while religious issues regularly appear with high levels of intensity in Israel, public policy even for the Holy City of Jerusalem resembles the situation in numerous Western democracies.

Religious interests are powerful enough to affect the political agenda but not so powerful as to dominate policymaking. The many and complex religious doctrines and practices multiply the demands coming from religious constituencies, and limit the influence of individual religious leaders. Secular interests, including the antireligious, are sufficiently powerful to block religious initiatives, though these either do not wish to dominate the state against religious interests, or they are not strong enough to do so.² While partisans of religion or of secular values both claim that the other is aggressive and dominates public policy, in reality there is a tense standoff between the two views.

Judaism's character as an ethnic religion permits a wide range of doctrinal postures. Judaism's roots in the Hebrew Bible include a collection of stories, laws, moral precepts, bits of theology, social criticism, and other wisdom collected over the centuries, rather than clearly ordered doctrines.³ Rabbinical traditions recognize disputes among sages and communal differences. As European Jews left the isolation of closed religious communities for the experience of the Enlightenment in the nineteenth century, they became enthusiastic socialists, free-market liberals, Zionists, humanists, agnostics, atheists, or pietists, and even the latter could choose from Hasidic, anti-Hasidic, and non-Orthodox congregations.⁴ The result is that the Jews of Israel, like those of the Diaspora, differ among themselves on religion and politics. Even those who think of themselves as Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox on the one hand, or antireligious on the other, do not agree with other members of the same groups on issues of public policy

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concerned with religion. While religious issues appear high on Israel's political agenda, other aspects of Israeli society and its history work to moderate the intensity of religious demands; there are few clear victories for religious or secular (including antireligious) groups.

Religious authorities have a formal monopoly on marriages and divorces performed in Israel, but actual practice is something of a muddle. The Interior Ministry records citizens as married or divorced when done outside the country (sometimes by mail, without ever leaving Israel), according to criteria that would not permit them to marry or divorce in Israel. Such confusion about religion and policy is the norm rather than the exception. Even in Jerusalem, with its history, holy sites, and diverse population, where religious issues are especially prominent, religious and secular interests exist in a condition of chronic tension. When religious activists have put issues on the political agenda, they have not been able to dictate how controversies will end.

One of the reasons that religious issues are permanently on the agenda is that they are not finally resolved one way or another. Not only are secular interests opposed to religious interests, the latter are not monolithic and are factionalized. Disputes on matters of principle, as well as competition between religious parties, yeshivot (religious academies), congregations, and personal animosities between rabbis get in the way of a solid Jewish religious front. Judaism is strong enough to assure respect, and one party is occasionally victorious, but falls short of defining the tangible substance of important policy issues, especially in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The distinction between policy issues that are symbolic and substantial is useful in considering the relationship of religion and politics. A policy that distributes money, services, or regulations is not necessarily more important than a policy concerning the design of a nation's flag, the words of a prayer to be said in an official ceremony, or the statement of a national leader about what is good, true, or just. To a religious or an antireligious citizen, someone else's behavior or failure to behave according to religious convention, the state's official stance with respect to a matter of doctrine, or its failure to take an official stance, may be a matter of the utmost importance.

The issue of Jerusalem illustrates the problems of sorting out the symbolic from the substantive. The Israeli government has committed itself not to negotiate the city's future in the peace process currently underway, but it has negotiated about negotiating it. The unity of Jerusalem under Israeli rule is not only a slogan pronounced by several political parties, but involves tangible issues of municipal boundaries and perhaps national boundaries, and who receives the public services of the municipality. At present, for example, a Palestinian, legally residing within the boundaries of the city, receives family payments (currently equivalent to U.S. \$80 per month for a family with two children under the age of 18), Israeli medical insurance, old age pensions, and access to work in Israel even when the border with the West Bank is closed. Similarly, the location of the United States Embassy in Jerusalem is not only

a symbolic site for an office building but defines aspects of international politics. Palestinian success in hosting the officials of foreign governments in East Jerusalem amounts to a claim to Jerusalem as their capitol. The history of this competition of symbolic demands led in the middle of the nineteenth century to competition between Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches with respect to their rights in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: this escalated from threats between Russia and France, and became one of the causes of the Crimean War.⁵

The importance of Jerusalem in Jewish memory and aspirations begins with the story of its capture by David about the first millenium B.C.E. and somewhat later his unrestrained joy while bringing the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem.⁶ One of the oldest subjects of Jewish sorrow is Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. The *Book of Lamentations*, according to rabbinical tradition, was written in response by the prophet Jeremiah. Years later, after Jerusalem had been rebuilt and then destroyed again by the Romans, and Jews were forbidden to enter the city, Jewish pilgrims would gather on the hills overlooking the site of the Temple and weep as they recited.

How solitary lies the city, once so full of people! Once great among nations, now become a widow; once queen among provinces, now put to forced labor!⁷

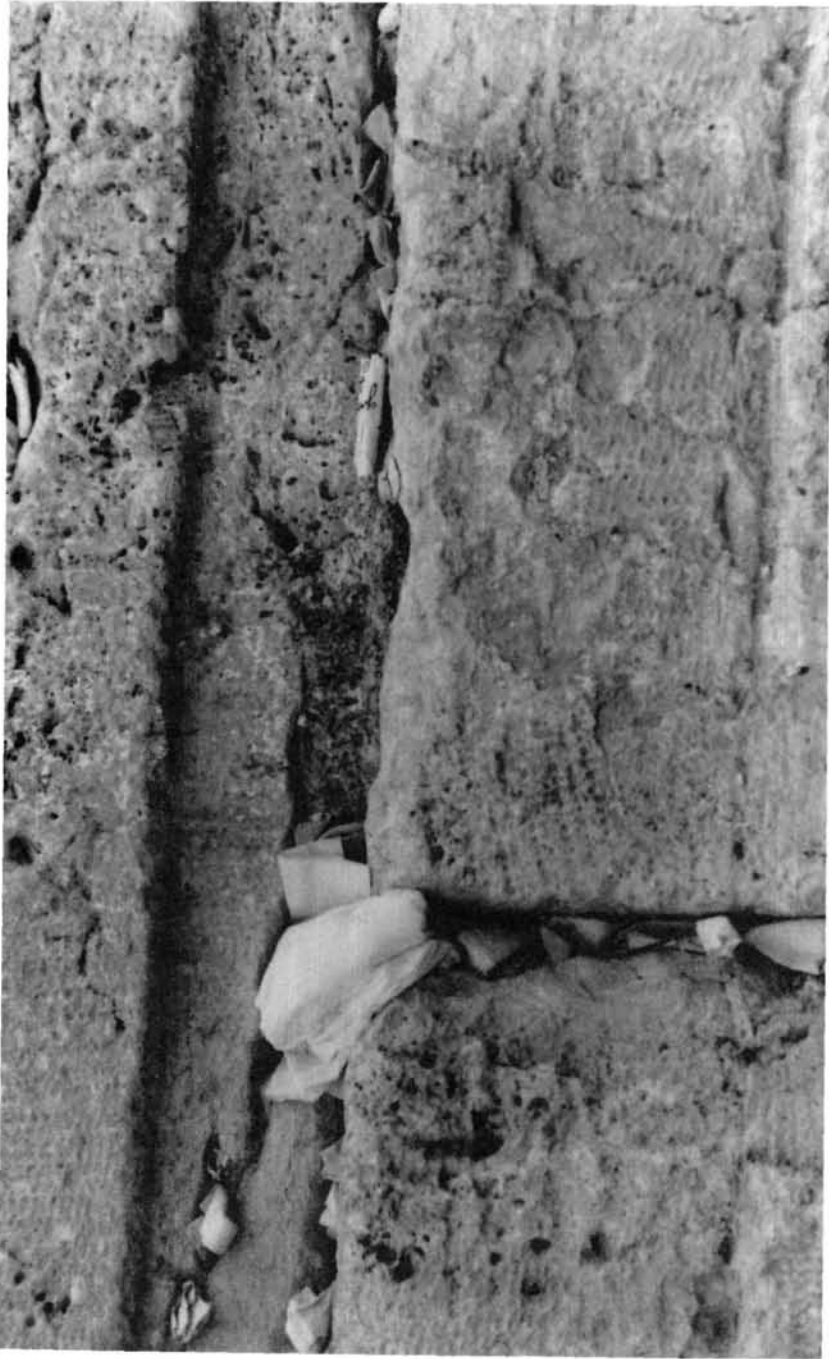
Early Christians viewed Jerusalem as cursed, rather than holy. They interpreted its destruction by the Romans in 70 C.E. as the Lord's punishment of the Jews for rejecting Jesus. It became sacred after the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 324 C.E. and his mother, Helena, claimed to locate the sites of Christ's crucifixion and burial, and began construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Some 775 years later, the triumph of the Crusaders was expressed in a comment of a knight who participated in their purge of the city:

Some of our men—and this was the more merciful course—cut off the heads of their enemies; others shot them with arrows so that they fell from the towers; others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames . . . men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies.⁸

The hyperbole of twentieth century Moslems is hardly less extreme.

. . . the Zionist usurpation and continued occupation of Jerusalem and Palestine . . . has perpetuated untold human misery and unleashed a seemingly unending reign of terror in a land held sacred by Moslems, Christians and Jews alike. As a result, more than a million men, women and children have been hounded out of their homes and forced to become refugees, while merciless Zionist persecution goes on throughout the length and breadth of their homeland.⁹

Modern Jews are also expansive about Jerusalem. The 1967 victory has been described as, "an act of God, providential, irreversible, final."¹⁰ And they argue



Western Wall

Tobie Lurie, October 1994



Tobie Lurie, October 1994

Church of the Holy Sepulchre



Scott David Noam Cook

Dome of the Rock

that "Jerusalem has a far more powerful corporate meaning for Judaism than for Christianity and Islam. Christians have Rome and Muslims have Mecca, but Jews have only Jerusalem."¹¹

Whatever their faith, Jerusalem attracts those with a spiritual mission. *Jerusalem syndrome* describes people found wandering the city with fantasies of participating in wondrous events. Notable instances include the Anglican Bishop James Albert Pike who wandered to his death in the Judean desert in 1969, and an Australian Christian tourist with a record of mental instability who set fire to al-Aqsa Mosque in August 1969.

Moslems built al-Aqsa in the eighth century; the Crusaders used it as a hostel, stable, and latrine during their occupation of the city from 1099; and the Moslems resanctified it in 1187. It sits on the Temple Mount (or Haram Esh-Sharif), which some Jews and fundamental Christians want to clear for the construction of a Third Temple. Israeli authorities view such plans as portending disaster, and they have set the police against those who would implement them.

Historic disputes between Jews, Christians, and Moslems are still at work, along with schisms in the Christian and Moslem communities. The clergy of Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Coptic churches still quarrel about jurisdictions in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Palestinians and the royal families of Jordan and Saudi Arabia argue about control of Islamic holy places: in late 1994 the Palestinian Authority and the Jordanian government each appointed a different Mufti for Jerusalem. The Palestinian's appointee occupied the main office while Jordan's Mufti settled into an anteroom; and Yassir Arafat accused the Israelis of favoring Jordanian claims over Jerusalem.

International tensions focused on Jerusalem assure that religion in the city is frequently on the agenda of Israel's national government. A number of governments give formal recognition to United Nations resolutions of the 1940s declaring Jerusalem an international city.¹² In the present climate of secularism that prevails among the major powers, Israeli officials do not fear a repeat of the Crusades. However, the following sentiment by the Archbishop of York in the nineteenth century expresses a continuing view that Jerusalem is a city of the world, and not entirely Israel's:

This country of Palestine belongs to you and me, it is essentially ours. . . . It was given to the father of Israel . . . that land has been given unto us. It is the land from which comes news of our redemption. It is the land to which we turn as the fountain of all our hopes; it is the land to which we look with as true a patriotism as we do to this dear old England.¹³

Religion overlaps with ethnicity in the modern city. Jews are about 72 percent of the municipal population, Moslems 26 percent, and Christians 3 percent. Jews classify themselves according to European, Asian, and North African descent, with a number of Sephardic families tracing their arrival as refugees from the Spanish Expulsion of 1492. More prominent than ethnicity

among the Jews is status with respect to religion. There is a shrinking majority of secular Jews, a growing minority of ultra-Orthodox, and a smaller minority of other Orthodox. There is no official designation or census of these classifications, but their size, growth, or decline is suggested by voting returns. Ultra-Orthodox parties polled 22 percent of the vote in the city, against only 8 percent of the vote nationwide in the 1992 election for the Knesset. Secular parties attracted about 74 percent of the vote in Jerusalem, and the Orthodox National Religious Party 7 percent. Fifteen years earlier, in the election of 1977, ultra-Orthodox parties won only 8 percent of the vote in Jerusalem. Ultra-Orthodox Jews concentrate in neighborhoods where more than 70 percent of the voters support their parties.¹⁴ Changing primary school enrollments from 1972 to 1992 show a growing number of ultra-Orthodox. The number of students in ultra-Orthodox primary schools increased from 17 to 42 percent of the Jewish total, while those in Jewish secular schools dropped from 53 to 32 percent.¹⁵

The prospect of religious violence is part of Jerusalem's past and present. Jews worry about enraged Moslems who kill Jews while shouting God is great! When that does occur the police mobilize to protect Arabs (and Jews who look like Arabs) on main roads near working-class Jewish neighborhoods. There the chant is Death to the Arabs, and some crowds have even shown their willingness to implement the slogan. Israeli security forces monitor the prospect of Arab demonstrations. Disputes in Jerusalem that touch issues of religion involving Christians or Moslems are handled mostly by communal leaders, who seem willing to minimize mass action and get what they can from the authorities. In order to keep from provoking Moslems, the police have for the most part prevented religious Jews from praying on the Temple Mount.

Religious disputes among Jews have been the most likely to cause visible disturbances. A common scenario is a charge by religious or antireligious activists that there has been a violation of the status quo. This policy of no change on matters of policy that involve religion is designed to limit disputes, but the status quo is vulnerable to contrasting interpretations. When a dispute catches hold, there is likely to be rhetorical escalation, street demonstrations with overturned trash dumpsters, fist fights between religious and antireligious participants, and mounted police squads trying to minimize the damage.

One of the mysteries of religious conflict is why specific issues arise and catch hold at a particular time. Numerous construction excavations uncover old bones, but only some of them attract national attention. Brigham Young University had a Jerusalem program for several years before Jewish activists made a point about the proselytizing doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Yad Vashem memorial to the victims of the Holocaust displayed photographs of naked concentration camp inmates for decades before ultra-Orthodox Jews protested their immodesty, and threatened to construct their own Holocaust Memorial if Yad Vashem did not remove the pictures. Major roads alongside ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods have carried Sabbath and holiday traffic for years between sporadic demands

that the roads be closed. Suddenly ultra-Orthodox demonstrators protest pictures in advertising posters, without any indications that female models are less modest than in the past. Butcher shops and restaurants have had no trouble selling pork, perhaps under the euphemism of “white steak,” until ultra-Orthodox protesters congregated outside their doors on a daily basis.

There are explanations for the timing of certain issues. At some construction projects the discovery of bones is not made public. Workers have a strong incentive to ignore them, insofar as publicity may stop the project and their paychecks for months. When the construction is meant to serve ultra-Orthodox interests, as in housing or schooling for a religious neighborhood, it may be possible for the contractor and the community to reach a quick and quiet arrangement for building around the location of the bones, or reinterring them elsewhere. The requirement to involve the archaeologists of the Antiquities Authority, upon the discovery of items that might have research value, has often provoked the ultra-Orthodox to demonstrate. The archaeologists want to study the site and the bones before reburial, while Orthodox practice requires minimum disturbance and immediate reburial. In parallel fashion the proselytizing of Mormons became an issue when the Jerusalem Center of Brigham Young University began construction of a striking new building overlooking the Old City. Earlier the program had been located in temporary quarters where it hardly made an impression on the city’s Jews.

In the case of the construction of roads and a new stadium that were opposed by religious activists, the outcomes have been delay or alteration in the implementation of policy rather than total reversal. No major thoroughfare has been closed to traffic on Sabbath or religious holidays. The exit of a new highway that brings traffic close to the ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods of Mea Shearim and Beit Israel was closed on Sabbaths and holidays, and a wall was constructed to screen the sight and sound of the main artery from the religious neighborhood.

The issue of provocative advertising in bus stops left the public agenda after an agreement was reached between the advertising company and religious representatives. While too early to assess the protest against Yad Vashem’s display of photographs showing naked concentration camp inmates, the museum seems to be standing by statements that the pictures are important in depicting the humiliation that was part of the Nazi policy toward Jews.

There have been secular victories: restaurants, discotheques, and cinemas have been opened on the Sabbath. The municipal bylaws which had kept them closed were overturned in a 1987 court decision, and religious politicians have not succeeded in enacting a new measure. And laws prohibiting the sale of non-kosher food are enacted but generally not enforced.

There are also demands by non-Orthodox rabbis for recognition and funds for their congregations which challenge the Orthodox religious establishment. The outcomes are mixed. The status quo remains to provide

Orthodox rabbis a monopoly of official functions with respect to marriages, divorces, and conversions performed in Israel. Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods have expanded; allocations of public resources to schools and other institutions of ultra-Orthodox communities have increased. Secular politicians charge that religious parties inflate their demands and receive excessive material rewards by virtue of their importance in governing coalitions. Religious politicians insist that they continue to receive less than their fair share of resources, and what they do receive is the result of legitimate politicking. Financial allocations for housing and infrastructure in religious neighborhoods, and support for religious schools and other institutions come from a variety of ministerial and quasi-governmental budgets, under numerous program headings. Complex and perhaps deliberately obscured book-keeping is one of the factors that discourages a comprehensive and persuasive record of who gets what. But there has also been an increase in the number of Reform and Conservative synagogues and schools in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Israel, with financial support from government and quasi-governmental organizations.

National politics reinforce the lack of clear religious or secular victories. One religious party, the Sephardi ultra-Orthodox SHAS, has been alternately in and out of the government coalition that has served since the election of 1992. Another ultra-Orthodox party, Torah Judaism, has declined to join in coalition with what it perceives to be an antireligious Meretz party. Torah Judaism has occasionally said that it supports the government from the outside, that is, not voting against it on certain no-confidence motions. Some speculate that governing parties have made financial concessions to religious programs and institutions in order to keep SHAS and Torah Judaism from being more firmly in the opposition. The National Religious Party (NRP) has staked out a position in opposition to the government, particularly in regard to Jewish settlements and other issues in the territories occupied in 1967. However, there is no clear indication that NRP-related settlements have been allowed to “dry up,” as some party activists claim. No Israeli government would lightly take a posture overtly against a religious party, due to the service of those parties as coalition partners of both the major parties, Labor and Likud, in the past, and the prospect that they will be needed in future coalitions.

The muddled standoff between religious and secular Jews at present resembles the situation of the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time religious parties controlled the balance of power, and Prime Minister Menachem Begin was inclined to add religiosity to the nationalist programs of the Likud. Religious politicians demanded the cessation of abortions and postmortems, archaeological digs (which they accused of despoiling ancient Jewish graves), as well as Sabbath flights of El Al Israel Airlines. They wanted the further liberalization of the Army’s policy of exempting religious women from service, insisted on defining who is a Jew according to religious law, and pressed for more money for religious institutions.

On several of these issues the religious parties won only symbolic victories. El Al ended its Sabbath flights, but other Israeli airlines expanded theirs. The Army eased its procedures for exempting religious women from military service. The criteria for allowing abortions in public hospitals were changed to exclude "social distress," but the Ministry of Health rejected the demand that a representative of the Rabbinate be included on the boards that applied the criteria to individual cases. The religious parties did not succeed in changing the Law of Return, which evades an explicit definition of who is a Jew and allows the immigration of non-Jewish relatives of Jews. Then as now, the clearest victory of religious parties seemed to be in the pragmatic politics of money. From 1977–1984, they won increased allocations for religious schools and housing in religious neighborhoods.¹⁶

With all the hyperbole of extreme slogans and mass demonstrations, there has been a lack of serious physical violence among Israeli Jews concerned with religion and politics. One scholar has made an exhaustive examination of politically-motivated killings among Jews from the end of the nineteenth century until the present, and concludes that the incidence has been low.¹⁷ An indicator that supports this conclusion is the occurrence of murders reported in the Statistical Abstracts of Israel and the United States. In 1991 the murder rate in Israel was 1.97 per 100,000 population, while it was 9.8 per 100,000 population in the United States; local rates were 80.1 in Washington, D.C., 68.9 in New Orleans, 65.0 in St. Louis, and 59.3 in Detroit.¹⁸ Rabbinical admonitions against sectarian conflict have their roots in the Jewish civil wars of the late biblical period. In order to cool tempers during periods of religious-secular tension, religious and secular leaders cite external threats to Israel and Judaism. The presence of Arab enemies, and the extensive military service of most Israeli males, provides a non-Jewish focus for aggression. In 1976 a Christian historian of Christianity expressed his admiration of Jews for inter-communal tolerance without the warring factionalism of Christian sects.¹⁹

An examination of individual religious-secular conflicts shows the difficulty of determining who wins. When excavation for a two-level road interchange in the French Hill neighborhood of Jerusalem was well advanced in 1993, contractors uncovered gravesites from the period of the Second Temple (535 B.C.E.–70 C.E.). Then began a process that has been seen so often as to be ritualized. Some activists cited rabbinical sources for the sake of moving remains to other gravesites in order to facilitate the city's development, while other activists cited rabbinical sources that opposed any disturbance of the dead.

Israel's archaeologists inserted themselves between those wanting to leave the graves as is, and those wanting a new intersection as soon as possible. Some religious leaders seemed willing to move the remains to other graves, but not to have them pass through the hands of the archaeologists. Archaeologists insisted on their legal rights to examine the bones, and to preserve the stone coffins for further research or exhibition.

What emerged was a committee decision to move the planned intersection eight meters westward in order to avoid the gravesites in question. This would have added more than ten million shekels (U.S. \$3.5 million) to the cost of the project and delay its completion by perhaps six months. It did not satisfy the archaeologists, who began a suit to realize their rights to excavate the gravesites. The proposal satisfied religious leaders only until another gravesite was discovered along the revised roadway. Then in a process that ends numerous controversies in Jerusalem, a delay helped to cool tempers. Work continued. Neither the religious protesters nor the archaeologists got what they wanted.

A year earlier, in 1992, a road project had generated opposition from the Antiquities Authority, concerned with the despoliation of ancient sites, and religious Jews concerned on this occasion with Sabbath traffic alongside an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. There was also opposition from Arabs who objected to the construction close to their properties, and from Likud Party activists. Since the highway followed the pre-1967 East-West border, the Likud opposed it, since it would emphasize the division of Jerusalem between Jewish and Arab sectors.

A protest by Christian clerics that the project would despoil holy sites, and their threat to bring the case to the United Nations, brought an outburst by Mayor Teddy Kollek.

Your behavior was antagonistic and totally out of proportion. . . . The antiquities found are being treated responsibly and professionally. . . . We let you know about the work. We could have simply covered it up and avoided all the problems, but this is not our way. . . . After all the years of dialog and cooperation, I am angry and insulted that you went to the press with complaints about the Israeli authorities without speaking to me.²⁰

Antiquities Authority officials concluded that the site was not important enough from an archaeological point of view to warrant building the highway elsewhere. They removed some artifacts for preservation, and presented a gravesite and bones that might be those of St. Stephan to the Armenian Church.

Jewish religious opposition peaked as the road was completed, and focused on Sabbath use. It was not enough that road planners had included a wall to screen the road and its noise from the religious neighborhood, and agreed to close an exit that led through the religious neighborhoods on the Sabbath. Antireligious Jewish politicians accused the ultra-Orthodox of trying to break the status quo by demanding the closing on Sabbath of a major road. Religious activists responded that the city's secular community had already broken the status quo by opening numerous pubs, discos, and restaurants seven days a week. Several Sabbaths saw massed ultra-Orthodox shouting over the violation of the Sabbath, overturning garbage dumpsters, and throwing stones at passing cars; there were also counterdemonstrations by

antireligious Jerusalemites. There were some injuries, short-term arrests of protesters, proclamations about the rule of law by Teddy Kollek and police officials, and counterproclamations by rabbis about the sanctity of the Sabbath. Sabbath drivers planned their routes with an ear to the radio, which reported on demonstrations as part of the hourly news. The police toughened their proclamations and demanded that rabbis accept a limited period for protests. After a few weekends allocated to demonstrations, Sabbath traffic used the road, but not the exit that led through the religious neighborhood. The police stationed forces on the road for several weeks, and the protests died.

The plurality of views characteristic of Jewish history is reinforced by the character of Israeli democracy. Jews dominate the political system, but individual Jewish factions have been unable to dominate the polity. No party has ever won a majority in a national election. Religious and secular parties have learned to bargain in a setting of inevitable coalition. The struggle between religious and antireligious activists is often loud and intense, but neither camp has been able to overcome the other. And how Jerusalem will fare in the negotiations of the peace process remains part of its contested future.

NOTES

1. On Israel's status as a Western democracy as viewed by political scientists, see Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Peter Y. Medding, *The Founding of Israeli Democracy 1948-1967* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). For critical assessments of Israeli democracy see Avner Yaniv, ed., *National Security and Democracy in Israel* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993); Michael Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Baruch Kimmerling, ed., *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
2. Jewish, Christian, Moslem, and Druze functionaries control the marriages and divorces of community members in Israel, according to the religious law of each community. Several population groups are not "Western," or only recently so. Jews who immigrated from North Africa, the Balkans, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia, together with their descendants, now comprise more than one-half of the Jewish population. One-sixth of the population is Arab, and some 10 percent is Jewish ultra-Orthodox.
3. Martin Buber, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," and "The Faith of Judaism," in his *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963).
4. Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Zvi Gitelman, ed., *The Quest for Utopia: Jewish Political Ideas and Institutions Through the Ages* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992); and Eli Lederhandler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
5. On the competing allegations about the contribution of holy sites to that war, see Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War? A Cautionary Tale* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1985); and Brison D. Gooch, ed., *The Origins of the Crimean War* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath & Co., 1969).

6. *II Samuel* 6. Citations are from *The New English Bible*, Oxford Study Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

7. *Lamentations* 1:1.

8. F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 285–86.

9. Islamic Council of Europe, *Jerusalem: The Key to World Peace* (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1980), p. vii.

10. Terrence Prittie, *Whose Jerusalem?* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1981), p. 1.

11. Saul B. Cohen, *Jerusalem: Bridging the Four Walls: A Geopolitical Perspective* (New York: Herzl Press, 1977), p. 23.

12. Shlomo Slonim, “The United States and the Status of Jerusalem, 1947–1984,” *Israel Law Review* 19, 2, Spring 1984, pp. 179–252.

13. Quoted in Neil Asher Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land 1799–1917* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 86.

14. Maya Choshen, “The Elections to the Knesset in Jerusalem: Statistical Outlook” (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1990), (Hebrew).

15. *Jerusalem Statistical Data* (Jerusalem Municipality and The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1983), p. 176; and *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem, 1992* (Jerusalem: Municipality of Jerusalem and Jerusalem Institute of Israel Studies, 1994), p. 257.

16. See the author’s, *What Makes Israel Tick? How Domestic Policy-makers Cope with Constraints* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1985), Chapter 4.

17. Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Political Assassinations by Jews: A Rhetorical Device for Justice* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993). For a less sanguine conclusion, see Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel’s Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

18. *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1992* (Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1993), Table 21.14; *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1993* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), Tables 300, 303.

19. “Countless varieties of Christianity have fought about matters of doctrine and interpretation, with each claiming to be a universal faith, more advanced doctrinally than tribal Judaism.” (Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (NY: Atheneum, 1976), Part One)

20. *The Jerusalem Post*, January 16, 1992, p. 1.

Taking the Argo to Nineveh: Jonah and Jason in a Mediterranean Context

GILDAS HAMEL

NATURALLY, THE BOOK OF JONAH MUST BE READ, FIRST and last, within its Hebrew context. Indeed, the text reverberates, especially to Hebrew ears, with clear echoes of biblical passages that come from the Noah story, from Jeremiah, Joel, and other prophets.¹ In numerous studies, commentators have pointed out these intertextual links, while disagreeing on the exact nature of their reemployment. They wonder if the author is being ironic, satirical, parodic, allegorical, or didactic.² Still, the story of Jonah also reads like a maritime tale whose meaning might be enriched and its themes emerge in bolder relief, were it set against its Mediterranean background, especially Greek lore. Wedged between the empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt, ancient Israel was also a Mediterranean country, in contact by sea from the earliest times with Greek civilization, among other maritime powers. While the cultural significance of this proximity has been recognized by some nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars, the use of the comparative method often has been too sweeping and led at times to reductive results.

In recent times, relatively little attention has been paid to the connections that the Jonah story may have to Greek tales, apart from a few notable recent and not so recent exceptions; elements of the legend of Heracles and the story of Perseus and Andromeda, for instance, are strikingly similar, as Cyril of Alexandria and Jerome had noted.³ In the end, though, these parallels have failed to impress most exegetes, who have concluded that they are not helpful in the interpretation of the book.

Yet the book of Jonah presents puzzling parallels with Jason and elements of the Argonauts' story. The parallel between Jason and Jonah, not mentioned by early Jewish or Christian writers, was evoked by a few classicists at the beginning of this century, because of an unusual representation of Jason found in 1833 in Caere (Cerveteri). Their comments are very brief, however, usually framed within a very broad comparative format, and without seeing and developing any analysis of the details that show the possible extent of cultural interaction.⁴ Furthermore, the connection between the two stories

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seems to have been long since forgotten and has not drawn any attention in the past sixty years.⁵

What I propose is to reexamine the parallels between Jonah and Jason. In particular, I hope to show how the author of Jonah plays with one of the variants of the story of Jason, or that Jonah's story, at the very least, can be placed within the nebula of variants of Jason's tale. The saga of the Argonauts seems to have been widespread in oral, written, and pictorial forms, while numerous representations of various elements of their story, conveniently gathered now in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*,⁶ are sufficient proof of its diffusion around the Mediterranean. Many stories attached to Jason as a kind of patron of navigators circulated widely. The differences to be found in the written versions of Pindar (518–438 B.C.E.), Euripides (ca. 485–ca. 406 B.C.E.), Apollonius of Rhodes (third century B.C.E.), Valerius Flaccus (flourished in the first c. B.C.E.), and the so-called Orphic Argonautica, attest to the fluidity of a multifaceted tradition which one imagines to have also been a living, ever-changing, oral tradition. One may suppose that from an early date, written, oral, and iconographic versions influenced each other in multiple ways.

My thesis, therefore, is that the author of the Jonah tale used bits of this widely circulating oral cycle within the framework of his own Hebrew tradition. His is a highly literate story, the work of a writer who used chiasmic structures, repetitions, puns, and ironic twists. In their reemployment in the Hebrew story, the elements of the tale of the Argonauts appear only as vestiges, although I think they are more significant than has been usually acknowledged.⁷ At a minimum, their selection and the way in which they are recast suggest an antipolytheistic attitude turned against Ionians, as well as against the more obvious Ninevites. Many more elements are at work than were previously thought to be, as the study of parts of the story, especially its philological and iconographic aspects, will soon make clear—an important consideration for the ongoing debate on the nature and complexity of cultural borrowings. Such study also sheds some light on the extent of Near Eastern influence on early Greek culture.⁸

My argument will proceed as follows: First, after a rapid synopsis of the stories, the mythological motifs they have in common will be laid out in detail. Secondly, I will propose an explanation for their use and shape in Jonah. Finally, I hope to show that the use of some of these common themes persisted in the later (mostly Christian) iconography of Jonah.

The Stories

In the extant written versions of the Argonauts' tale, Jason, son of Aeson, and great-grandson of Aeolus the wind, is given by his rival Pelias the impossible task of bringing back the Golden Fleece from Colchis. This is the fleece of a ram which was sacrificed after saving Phrixus, in a story reminiscent of the Akedah in Genesis 22. The Golden Fleece is hanging on a tree in Ares' sacred wood in

Colchis, Aeetes' kingdom, and is guarded by a never-sleeping dragon. At Jason's call, the bravest of the Greeks hurry to the Argo, a ship built for Jason by Argos, with Athena's help. On their way to Colchis, the country of the sunrise in the Orient, the Greeks meet with many challenges. The greatest danger they encounter in trying to reach their goal is a stormy sea in which they must pass through the shifting or clashing rocks, the Planctae or Symplegades, which the sea alternately pushes apart and brings together. Once in Colchis, they ask King Aeetes for the Fleece. He promises it to Jason, provided the latter can subjugate the brazen-hoofed and fire-breathing bulls, plow a field, and sow the teeth of the local dragon. Jason manages these feats with the crucial help of the king's daughter, Medea. Because Aeetes goes back on his word, Jason sets out to steal the Golden Fleece. He succeeds, again with the help of Medea, who puts the ever-watching dragon to sleep with a magic potion. The Argonauts then flee with the Fleece and the king's daughter.

Jonah's tribulations, in contrast to Jason's, begin with a divine call. The task proposed by God to the hero of the book of Jonah is to bring a divine warning to the traditional enemy of Israel. However, rather than obeying, Jonah flees to the other end of the world, on a ship going to Tarshish. During the storm caused by God, the pagan crew, in great fear, prove to be respectful of all gods, especially Jonah's, and helpful to the hero. Jonah tells them he is the cause of the storm and following his advice, they reluctantly throw him overboard. He is swallowed by a large fish, kept in its entrails for three days, and finally vomited out onto dry land, after a long prayer which he expresses in the form of a psalm.

God reiterates his call, in spare words, and Jonah goes to Nineveh where he reluctantly announces the oracle, insisting on the impending doom. The oracle has been barely broadcast—Jonah has walked but one day in a city “of three days”—yet its call is immediately heeded by the Ninevites, and even more surprisingly, by the king who, though hardly informed of it, takes sackcloth and begins to fast. He orders all his subjects, even animals, to do likewise, in the hope of turning away God's anger.

God's anger gives way to mercy, which in turn makes Jonah very angry. He storms out of Nineveh, builds a hut wherein he waits to see what will happen. Overnight, God makes a miraculous tree grow; Jonah finds its shade soothing and pleasant. Next, God sends a worm, which causes the tree to die, and a hot wind, which makes Jonah wish for death. In the ensuing discussion between God and Jonah, God shows that his concern for the Ninevites is at least as valid as that of Jonah for the shade tree. The story ends abruptly, without indicating whether Jonah accepts God's point of view or not.

Motifs Common to the *Argonautica* and *Jonah*

Several parallel motifs are of considerable significance in both stories: the names of the heroes, the presence of a dove, the idea of “fleeing” like the wind

and causing a storm, the attitude of the sailors, the presence of a sea-monster or dragon threatening the hero or swallowing him, and the form and meaning of the difficult word *kikayon*. Looking at these themes and motifs reciprocally illuminates both accounts.

Names

First of all, the names of the two sea adventurers appear to be strikingly similar, at least in Greek. Jonah's name in Hebrew, *Yōnah*, when transliterated in Greek as *Iōnas*, can easily be seen as a metathesis of *Iasōn*. Whether that was a factor in the author's choice of a name cannot be known. But it is curious to read in the twelfth-century commentator Eustathius that an ancient tradition thought the name Jason was a metathesis of his own father's name, *Aisōn*.⁹ The fluidity of this name, together with the personality of the hero, may explain why Jason was one of several Greek names often used by Jews in Palestine, Egypt, and Cyrenaica, at least from the third century B.C.E. on.¹⁰ Regarding Cyrenaica, it is notable that in some of the many variants on the return of the Argonauts,¹¹ the latter reach Africa and meet a Triton, the merman of pre-Greek mythology, who announces to them that Cyrene would be the possession of their descendants. The legends and the name of an heroic sailor circumnavigating the sea on the first mythic long-ship would have appealed to Jews and other peoples who were settling around the Mediterranean sea. This interest is still in evidence at the time of the so-called "Tomb of Jason" in Jerusalem, which is dated to the beginning of the first century B.C.E. and contains a Greek inscription and the drawing of a military ship.¹²

Doves

The second element in the comparison of the two stories concerns the name of Jonah alone. *Yōnah* in Hebrew means "dove," one of the birds used in very ancient sailing practice to guide lost sailors to land, as we see both in the story of Noah and the saga of Jason and the Argonauts.¹³ When the Argonauts arrive at the Clashing Rocks (the Symplegades) and are unable to find a way out, Phineus, a king-prophet hunted by the Harpies (perhaps because he has betrayed divine secrets), advises the heroes to release a dove to see if it will go through. (The story uses an old theme which appears already in a different form in the *Odyssey*: the flock of doves bringing ambrosia to Zeus must also go through the Planctae but invariably one dove is lost.) The Argo eventually follows the dove; bird and ship find a passage through the rocks, but not without leaving a few vestiges behind them—one, its feathers and the other, pieces of rigging. In other variants of the story, doves also play an important role; in Virgil's *Aeneid*, for instance, two doves lead Aeneas and the Sybil to the Golden Fleece hanging in a tree.¹⁴ In other texts, the prophecies uttered by an oracular oak are reported by doves.¹⁵

Boreas, the fleeing wind

There is a further connection to Phineus, who in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, is pursued by the vengeful Harpies because he has betrayed prophetic secrets. After promising the Argonauts that he will help them with his prophetic gifts, he is delivered from his pursuers by the Boreads, the "fleers," sons of Boreas, the northern wind that brings the worst storms at sea.¹⁶ The story of Jonah begins very abruptly with his flight, right after God's command that he go and deliver his oracle to Nineveh. Jonah betrays nothing of the divine message entrusted to him, but he flees to avoid its accomplishment (as he sees it), and does so without explanation. He flees from the consequences of the message he has received but, paradoxically, not the structure of prophetic tales, in which one expects failure. In these stories, the structure is as follows: the more trustworthy the prophets, the less willing to hear them their audience will be. Above all, kings are expected to resist the message and punish the messenger, thereby increasing the element of veracity for the audience of the story. In fear of retaliation, Elijah flees to the wilderness of Horeb after his victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, walks one day in the desert, sits under a broom tree, and asks for death, saying: "Israel has forsaken the covenant, slain prophets, and I, even I only, am left."¹⁷ In the second part of his adventure, Jonah also flees to an analog of the desert, that is, a dry place, with wind, as opposed to the fluid and humid vastness stirred up by storm winds. But he is not pursued. Jonah does what prophets (and Jason and his friends) are supposed to do, namely, he flees, but for no apparent reason. He is pushed by rhetorical reason alone, the force of the text, and previous biblical stories.

The puzzling motif of Jonah's flight, however, is connected to the Argonautic cycle of stories in two ways. First of all, it indirectly creates a storm caused by God's great wind, in Hebrew *ruah gdolah*. Secondly, the Hebrew word for fleeing in Jonah 1.2, *boreah*, corresponds closely to the name of Boreas, the storm god and father of the Boreads. A "fleeing" sea creature, a leviathan, actually appears in the texts of Ras Shamra and is mentioned in Isaiah 27.1 and Job 26.13. It is a sea-monster originating in the primordial chaos and threatening chaos. In the story of Jonah, however, the "fleeing" is separated from the monster, yet still connected to a storm. I propose therefore that the Greek word Boreas has a semitic origin, perhaps the Ugaritic *boreah*. Chantaine's *Dictionnaire étymologique du grec classique* gives no sure origin for the Greek word, but the presence of other Argonautic elements in the story of Jonah makes it distinctly possible that mythical elements surrounding Boreas were borrowed by the Greeks, together with the name, from Semitic mythology. The stories surrounding this divinity or hero associated with storms were adopted at a much earlier stage, perhaps at the end of the second millennium before our era. The sound change from a pharyngeal to an alveolar fricative ("heth" to "s") is natural, since Greek lacked the former (a later example of this sound change appears in one of Jerome's letters, in which he speaks of a Silas whose Hebrew name is *Shaloh*).

Sailors

In Greek stories and in ancient folklore in general, sailors had a terrible reputation. It was thought that they were only after passengers' possessions and money, which they could try to obtain, for example, by forcing a victim to sign a will in their favor before throwing the person into the sea. The sailors in the Argonauts' saga are of an heroic type and do not do this. They are dangerous, however; in the later *Argonautica Orphica*, these adventurers behave according to expectations and become angry at Medea, because she has been denounced by the speaking or prophesying beam of the Argo. They are ready to throw her to the fish but Jason calms them in time to save her.¹⁸ In a different story reported by Herodotus, sailors behave also as expected, throwing Arion of Mytilene overboard, out of greed for his money and possessions. He is saved by a dolphin that is sensitive to his poetic and musical gifts.¹⁹

By analogy, then, the much debated psalm in the book of Jonah could be, among other things, a parody of widely known stories about music-loving animal helpers. In any case, Jonah's sailor companions, contrary to what an ancient audience would expect, are respectful, tame, and even unselfish, though the reason for their civility may be simply a healthy fear of Jonah's God. Here is a man who, seemingly imprudently or rashly, has hired the whole ship and paid in advance, an action noted as unusual in talmudic literature.²⁰ He is a foreigner, alone, without protector or friend, at the mercy of a whole crew against whom he could never retaliate. Yet, these rough fellows not only do not attempt to kill him out of greed, but they do a most dangerous thing in stormy weather: they try to bring the ship to shore to save their onerous passenger.²¹

According to a literal interpretation of his Hebrew name, Jonah is a "dove" kept in the hold of the ship, something light and capable of flight. Yet, he engages in a downward movement, going down to Jaffa, into the ship, then down into its hold, where he falls into a deep sleep (*wayyerâdam*, a word also evoking, phonetically at least, a downward movement), and finally down into the great fish. Normally, passengers and crew were on the deck. The Hebrew text suggests that Jonah himself becomes part of the cargo; he is a piece of the ballast, often merchandise but normally stones or sand, kept in the depths of the hold of the ship. Surely, he is stowed in the most dangerous place of the ship, among stones and heavy cargo which could crush him in a storm. One might think of him as being in the same position as the oak beam placed by Athena Pallas in the Argo, a beam which occasionally utters "true" prophecies or predictions. The beam reveals Zeus' anger and invites the heroes to purify themselves,²² or warns that they are being pursued by the Erinyes, who avenge wrongs, especially murders committed among kinsmen.²³ Another similarity is that in helping the crew, and being "helped" by them, Jonah is acting like Phineus the seer, already mentioned above, whom the Argonauts—specifically the Boreads, Calais and Zetes, sons of Boreas—help after receiving precious information from him.²⁴



Alinari/Art Resource, NY: Museo di Villa Giulia, Rome, Italy

Jason Disgorged by the Dragon. Greek Vase Painting. c 5th cent. B.C.E.



Repose of Jonah. On a sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua Rome, c. 3d cent.

Deutsches Archaeologisches Institut, Rome, Italy

Sea-monsters

There is no musically enchanted dolphin in the book of Jonah, but a large fish or *ketos* who swallows and then vomits up the hero. Neither is there a leviathan or dolphin in the extant textual variants of Jason's odyssey. But Jason does fight a sea- or land-monster in several of the variants of the tale, often represented on vases, in actions similar to those of Heracles.²⁵ Or in scenes found widespread around the Mediterranean, Jason emerges from a coiled, upright serpent or monster.²⁶ It is in this context that earlier scholars briefly noted the connection with Jonah. In particular, a beautiful red-figured cup found at Cerveteri (Caere) in 1833 and dated from the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E. (490–475) shows a scaly and wide-eyed monster vomiting a limp, naked, bearded, and long-haired Jason. To the right of the scene is Athena, with spear in her right hand, bird in her left, and perhaps looking into the eyes of the dragon, whom she has commanded to disgorge Jason.²⁷ Behind the dragon's head, at left, the Golden Fleece hangs as limp as Jason, on a tree laden with fruit (apples?). It is most natural to conceive of this monster as a sea-monster, as did A. Flasch and other scholars,²⁸ given the position of Cerveteri, an Etruscan sea-port which would be understandably interested in Jason's *Gesti* as those of the first navigator. An abundance of maritime themes at the place is evidence of this interest. The Boreads themselves do not appear to be represented at Caere but they figure prominently in many other places, for instance, in Laconia.²⁹

This cup has been widely commented upon in the past, but has remained unnoticed, as far as I am aware, by biblical commentators. Late nineteenth and turn-of-the-century commentators offer varying interpretations of this scene. A. Flasch thinks that the dragon is alive, forced to disgorge a passive Jason, which is also my interpretation.³⁰ Flasch is followed by H. Schmidt and others, such as Pfuhl and Kerényi. Vian, in his recent edition of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, mentions the cup without comment. M. Lawrence, after E. Pfuhl and K. Kerényi, thinks it is a sea-monster "forced by Athena to disgorge Jason [. . .] a rare variant of the famous story."³¹ The rest of Lawrence's article deals with the iconography of Jonah's story. But the commentary of P. E. Arias and M. Hirmer on Athena is inexact. They think that Athena, with owl, is looking with surprise at Jason coming out of the dragon's mouth.³²

It is interesting to discover that a version of Jason's story had Athena as his helper, rescuing him from death, which is perhaps closer to the role of the Hebrew God in the book of Jonah. The bird she carries on her left hand, however, is not necessarily the usual owl, as all commentators seem to identify it,³³ but could actually be a dove (or a sea bird). Athena's owl is usually represented with its head turned outward, facing the viewer, at least in all images of her catalogued in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.³⁴ On the Caere cup, the bird has a straight beak and a more sloping body. However, since ornithological details may not have been the concern of the vase painters, the idea of a dove can only remain a suggestion. The role played by doves in reporting prophecies and helping heroes has been mentioned

above: in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the crew of the Argo takes along a dove in a cage. They also are featured in several illustrations of the episode of the capture of the fleece.³⁵

The "kikayon"

In the second part of Jonah's story, the word *kikayon* is a famous *hapax legomenon* which, in its context, refers to a plant, with later tradition hesitating between a type of gourd and *ricinus communis* (castor oil).³⁶ Many interesting explanations have been offered, none of them entirely convincing.³⁷ No one seems to have noticed, however, that this word sounds very much like the brew prepared by Medea, *kukeon* or *kukaon* (from the verb *kukaô*, to stir up, to create confusion), in Apollonius' version and in the *Argonautica Orphica*.³⁸ Here, a mysterious potion, a mixture made of medicinal and dangerous plants,³⁹ is used by Medea to put to sleep the serpent or dragon guarding the tree where the fleece was hanging. In Apollonius, Medea rubs the head of the monster with the potion and sprinkles it to achieve the same result. In some later (Roman) representations, she is shown presenting a vial to the serpent coiled around the tree, while Jason, unseen, grabs the Golden Fleece. The *kukaon* or *kikaon* is also the name of the drink of barley gruel and water, associated with Eleusinian mysteries,⁴⁰ where perhaps the role of the python had been similar to that of the sea monster in ancient versions of the tradition. The problem is that the *kikayon* of the Hebrew story is obviously a fast-growing plant, not a potion or brew. Yet, the Greek magic mixture is clearly made with pharmacological plants. Furthermore, whatever the Hebrew *kikayon* denotes, it acts as an emetic or aims at making Jonah rid himself of his anger, in a punning parallel with his disgorgement from the fish. I would like to suggest, then, that the *kikayon* of the book of Jonah may have lost its original meaning but has retained the idea of a magic act, perhaps together with the emetic or purging virtue of the original, suggested by the Hebrew sound (*wayaqe'* in Jonah 2.11, from the verb *qi'*) associated later with other plants, such as the *ricinus*. In the Hebrew text also, the dragon has been reduced to a worm, an annoyance whose night work, however, makes Jonah wish for death. In the second part of Jonah's story, there is no magician (daughter of a king) or any dragon to be put to sleep. There is, however, a gleeful and absurd reduction of the Greek monster to the size of a worm and the fire-breathing of an irate Jonah whom God attempts to calm down.

The Function of Greek Motifs in Jonah

It is not surprising in itself that motifs and characters from a version of the story of the Argonauts would appear in the book of Jonah, when one considers how widespread they are in the literary (from the fifth century B.C.E.) and iconographic record (from the eighth century B.C.E.) of the whole Mediterranean region. Furthermore, the Hebrew story is far from being a pale recasting of

Jason's adventures. The related elements of flight and storm complicate the picture; we learn that Semitic versions of this story had been circulating for an even longer time, and had themselves been borrowed by the earliest Greek settlers of the Mediterranean. The Greeks seem to have borrowed a Boreas and sea-monsters at an early date. Textual and pictorial materials show that Greeks took over stories of sea-monsters from the East in the early, so-called "orientalizing" period.⁴¹ Behind Jonah's story and its vestigial echoes of Jason and the Argonauts, there are remains of an older, more widely told story of a fight between a god and a sea-monster.⁴² These stories all seem to belong to the category of tales of voyages to the netherworld.⁴³ Secondly, the creator of Jonah appears to be playing in a very conscious manner with some of the elements and motifs of the Greek story, inverting some, laminating others, or fusing them with Hebrew themes on the basis of linguistic or structural similarities.

One may begin with the complex geography of the Argonauts' saga, which has been drastically simplified in the story of Jonah, with only Tarshish and Nineveh mentioned as presumably summarizing the known world contained between these extremities. And then there is, at least at a superficial level, the beneficial dove of the Argonauts' tale, which is turned into an occasion of trouble for the sailors of the Hebrew story. At a deeper level, however, it causes the conversion of the crew, who sacrifice to the proper god after they have been saved. Throughout the ordeal they act civilly, even generously, though not heroically, instead of showing the greed and lack of courage which are their normal attributes, as in the much later and edifying story of Paul of Tarsus' shipwreck in *Acts* 27.⁴⁴

The storm is not a dangerous moment for Jonah but rather simply a means to return the hero to the land he should not have left. Instead of being sent away on a highly risky journey by a jealous or fretful king figure, he chooses to bring his fate upon himself. The king in the second part of the story is not a frightening or vengeful character bent on eliminating or testing the hero or prophet, as are Pelias, Aeetes, or even Jezebel in Elijah's story. Rather, he is most pliable, a keen listener, obedient, and prompt to repent. The never-sleeping dragon guarding the Golden Fleece has been miniaturized and become a worm. I have suggested above that some of its characteristics have been given to Jonah himself, who watches intently over the city he wishes to see destroyed. Like the dragon preventing Jason's possession of the wondrous Fleece (a magical remain of a foundational sacrifice), Jonah fiercely blocks access to divine mercy. He is willing to face God in hot anger and apparently knows no reason. The pharmaceutical mixture which Medea uses to put the monster to sleep has changed in form but retained its soothing quality for the overheated Jonah. Yet, the leafy *kikayon* remains somewhat of a conundrum. In the later iconography mentioned below, Jonah is seen resting under, or surrounded by, a large-leafed bush which resembles some of the earlier images of the tree in which Jason finds the Golden Fleece. Perhaps tree and magic mixture have been associated from the earliest times.

The question now is whether this recasting of the Greek story has been done simply in jest, or is part of a more complex structure. The comparison of certain themes present in both stories may throw some light on this problem. Jason's calm, contrasted with Aeetes' anger, parallels Jonah's extraordinary passivity. Jason needs assistance at every crucial turn of the story and appears weak, a kind of anti-hero.⁴⁵ But Jonah's passivity does not stem from meekness, rather it comes from his extreme view of prophecy. Medea's night monologue in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3.771ff., when she is wavering in her desire to help Jason tame Aeetes' monstrous bulls, presents interesting parallels to that of Jonah. Perhaps it is not overly speculative to say that the way in which Apollonius presents Hellenism as immensely seductive to Medea, daughter of a tyrant, has its counterpart in the Hebrew author's idea of a natural attraction that pagan sailors, and Nineveh's king and people feel for the Jewish God. This appeal has little to do with Nineveh, whose historical kingship ended at a much earlier time than the composition of this story, but would make sense in an atmosphere of competition between Hebrew and Greek cultures. The author might be inverting the image of attraction presented by Greek civilization, and so present foreigners suitably attracted to the Hebrew divinity when they are Greeks (the sailors?), and stupidly so when they are Ninevites.

Recent studies of the book of Jonah, while discovering new layers of meaning in the story, have exposed the complex structure of the narrative.⁴⁶ They reinforce the notion that the work is an ironic parable, one with a pointed question. The parallels between the story of Jonah and that of Jason I have outlined point even more strongly in the same direction. To the irony underlined by several commentators,⁴⁷ it is possible to add a new twist, namely that Nineveh encompasses the "Ionians" also. Nineveh and *Yavan* sound similar, as do *Yōnah* the "dove," *Yōniyah* the ship, and Ionia the region. Phonetically as well as mythopoetically, it appears that the author of the book of Jonah is playing with a variant or variants of Jason's adventures as told in Greek and other languages, selecting some of its motifs or sounds and refashioning them for altogether different purposes, all the while with a view to entertain. The author has manipulated a myth, which had become alien and re-elaborated parts of it in order to reflect on and reinforce his own cultural values.⁴⁸ The hero's name, a storm caused by a fleeing/northern wind, uncontentious sailors, a sea-monster swallowing and regurgitating the hero under divine command, a monster diminished to worm size in the second part, a magic emetic—all these serve the author's meaning and the story's purpose.

If it is true that the element of mockery of the Greeks is part of this story, then all the more reason to set aside the view of the book of Jonah as a didactic parable teaching that divine compassion knows no boundaries and is universal.⁴⁹ Christian exegetes in particular have often propounded a universalistic interpretation, put forward by Jerome, for instance, and especially by Ephrem the Syrian, who had his own neighborly reasons to offer a literal interpretation and present the Ninevites in a flattering light.⁵⁰ Philo of Alexandria could have

been expected to offer this kind of interpretation but it is absent from his commentaries on Jonah.⁵¹

In line with tradition, I would argue rather that the problem posed by God's boundless compassion is the primary subject of this story. The question is framed in an ironic and even tragic mode, in spite of the author's apparently jocular manner. The geographical or ethnical considerations on the bounds of divine compassion which later (Christian) interpretation found congenial add a new, secondary dimension to the original story, the main point of which is to highlight a debate or question intrinsic to Israel. It is the answer to that question, in turn, which may be given universal significance.

As commentaries have long shown, the book of Jonah presents a reflection on the dangers of prophecy. In Israel, oracles of doom had long before given place to conditional oracles, which were better suited to the vagaries of historical circumstances. But the conditions for belief in conditional oracles appear to have developed also in the Graeco-Roman world. Even though on the surface they differ in mode, goals, and significance, a self-questioning or ironic discourse on prophetic traditions arose in both cultural areas.⁵² Similar questions were raised in Hebrew and Greek stories regarding the functioning of divine justice and mercy and their mechanisms. This is not to say that the Greek and Hebrew *Weltanschauungen* of the time were identical. Rather their differences are to be sought at another level, in the tautness of the question that the author is asking Israel, as will presently be seen. This tenseness, I suggest, stems from the structure of Hebrew revelation, in which the dialogue regarding the mechanisms of history was projected as being conducted with a God who is creator of the universe, and therefore free and totally gracious, above any contingency. This divinity might well decide to reverse or change the flow of nature or history, thus lifting the burden of fatality. From the prophet's point of view, however, the kind of conditional oracles that the nature of the divinity required made the dangers of life altogether too predictable.

Yet, the story of Jonah contains a more poignant idea than a concern for the prophet's thorny position. If the tale places its hero Jonah in a rhetoric of prophecy that is problematic, it also implies a basic questioning of Israel's relation to God. Jonah is apparently caught in a dilemma between basic tenets of Israel's faith, whose consequences the author exaggerates to bring them into clear conflict with each other. Jonah is shown as trapped between two extreme ideas: one is the notion of the automaticity, swiftness, and infinite range of God's justice and anger in response to Israel's failures; the other is its converse, namely the automaticity, and infinite patience, of divine compassion.

One may imagine the ancient Hebrew or Judaeon audience of the story smiling at the Ninevites' (or Ionians') expense, for how could the latter be so dense as to think of divine mercy as remotely possible for them? Furthermore, how could this compassion be exercised towards people who, in Israel's estimation, did not even know the boundaries of sinful action and included in it their domestic herds? Here, there may have been a dark joke or innuendo, still

having force for later Jewish commentators, regarding the sexual mores of Ninevites (or Greeks/Ionians; it may have been a joke often reciprocated). But Nineveh is the converse of Israel, where prophetic and Deuteronomistic traditions would have it that conversion has hardly ever been completed in the past, or that it has been accomplished by a few rare individuals, and specifically not by kings, who need repeated warnings in the normal discourse of prophecy.

The story contains a logical exercise or equation which can be formulated as follows: If a conversion which is rhetorically and historically wrong (no effort by the “prophet”; too obedient a king; in Nineveh the paradigmatic enemy) brings about the immediate and full benefits of divine mercy, then shouldn’t the listeners ask themselves what the proper dynamics of conversion and mercy are? “How much” conversion is actually necessary, at what point does mercy “kick in,” and what must one do, short of total conversion, which is actually so impossible that it looks silly? The author’s vision of what a divine determinism would entail is amusing, at least superficially. But this vision of the world is ironic, in that it questions the listeners’ ordinary notions, which are of a world bound by determinisms of all kinds, yet freed, even at the most physical level, by the word of God.

In the book of Jonah, physical nature is entirely removed from the reach of determinism: storm, fish, worm, are all appointed by divine command. But, and this to me is part of the irony of the book, determinism is applied to the divine sphere. In Greek stories, on the contrary, there is considerable fickleness to be found in the Greek gods. So, here too, the author might be thinking about Greek conceptions of the world, under cover of anti-Ninevism. The lesson of the book, if there is one, is the strengthening of “ordinary” or common perceptions—I mean ordinary for a listener or reader of the biblical stories—not for a non-Hebrew, say a Greek, who precisely has these beliefs, namely that the gods are all powerful, and that nature is essentially ruled by unpredictable gods. The hidden philosophy of the book, to be derived from its ironical posture, would be exactly contrary to its surface story and to popular forms of Greek wisdom. It would be suggesting that there is determinism in nature, but complete divine freedom.

In Greek mythology and theater, the precautions taken to keep the heroes away conspire to bring them back to the center of the drama through a complicated chain of events. The book of Jonah does away with the niceties of the complex mechanism which Greek drama slowly unfolds, and presents a hero who, though naked and battered, remains proud before his God.

Echoes of Jason in the Later Iconography of Jonah

Jonah as naked hero features prominently in later Christian iconography. Scholars have shown that ancient versions of sea stories and especially their iconography (for instance combinations of the story of Heracles and Hermione), were integrated more or less successfully in Christian retellings and illustra-

tions of Jonah's story.⁵³ I suggest that among the themes reemployed in this iconography, some of the motifs of the Jason cycle might have an important role which has not been brought to light until now, at least to my knowledge. Motifs which were common to both stories in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. (and even before?) are still fused together in the first centuries of our era. I can indicate only briefly some of the parallels and adaptations, however, while hoping that a full study of the representations of Jason and Jonah be undertaken in the future to test the hypothesis.

The transformation of motifs taken from Graeco-Roman depictions of other heroes and their reemployment in Christian and Jewish representations of Jonah have long been noted. For instance, it has been shown that the image on a sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua of a naked Jonah resting languidly under a vine, closely resembles that of Endymion reclining in seemingly beatific pleasure, with his right arm stretched behind his head.⁵⁴ Structurally speaking, however, and without dismissing the aforementioned striking comparison, the presence of a ship, a sea monster to the left (not a whale or fish), a tree (not a gourd?) above Jonah, with a ram and two sheep (?) above him, and a woman standing to his right—all of these elements make sense as the continuation of the Jason imagery. I propose therefore that the artist conflated stock images of both Jason and Endymion. I note also that this paradisiac interpretation of Jonah under the gourd, though in line with the Jewish interpretation of the *sukkah* and the Christian idea of resurrection, and fitting long-standing representations of Endymion and even Jason (there is an Edenic quality to the wood where the latter finds the Golden Fleece), is completely contradictory to the sense one gets of Jonah in the Hebrew story, namely that of an angry and sulking man. Furthermore, in the biblical story, the episode of the gourd is placed after Jonah goes to Nineveh and is separated from the storm and disgorgement episode. But in the Jewish or Christian iconography of Jonah, the gourd scene is set close by the ship and sea monster or whale, and Nineveh is altogether absent. The simplest explanation for this juxtaposition is that painters and sculptors were fitting familiar images from Greek mythology onto Jonah's story.

In one of his letters, Augustine answers, or rather dodges, a curious question asked by a pagan friend of the Carthaginian priest Deogratias, who is writing to the bishop of Hippo for intellectual ammunition he might use in his discussions with that friend.⁵⁵ The question seems to be occasioned by a representation of Jonah very much like the one described above, and other similar images in which the ocean adventure and the "gourd" scene are juxtaposed. The pagan friend wishes to be enlightened about the meaning of the gourd plant growing above Jonah, who has just been disgorged by the monster.⁵⁶ This pagan man may have heard the biblical story but more certainly he has seen Jonah represented as vomited by a monstrous sea-creature on the seaside, probably naked,⁵⁷ under the gourd. The scenes of the vomiting and the gourd could be kept apart, as in the fourth century mosaic at

Aquileia, for instance. Yet there are numerous representations setting both motifs side by side. One could argue that this proximity was a function of artistic convenience alone but it makes good sense to see in it the direct influence of the figurative Jason cycle.

A proper elucidation of the role of the Jason story in these traditions might help to explain some of the questions that ancient representations posed for early Christian interpreters and exhortative preaching. There are curious silences in early Christian teaching regarding, for instance, the treatment of the episode of the gourd, Jonah's nakedness and baldness, which stand out in contrast to the images of Jonah. The latter detail forms an interesting puzzle: compare Jason on the Cerveteri cup, bearded, with long wavy and glistening hair, hanging below him like the fleece, and Jonah. Jason's lustrous hair is also mentioned by Pindar.⁵⁸ Early pictures of Jonah, likewise, show him long-haired, occasionally bearded. An eastern Mediterranean marble figure from the second half of the third century C.E., for instance, has a bearded, long-haired, and naked Jonah being vomited out of a sea monster (part whale?).⁵⁹ For the *Midrash on Jonah*, however, the heat inside the monster was so intense that Jonah lost his clothes and his hair. But in this case, it may have been the classical representations of yet another hero, namely Heracles, which brought about the theme of baldness and nakedness (though, as mentioned in a note above, nakedness seems to have been a standard component of any image of shipwrecked victims). As for the gourd usually shown above Jonah, it might have been part of the stock images used for Jason at a very early stage. In an Etruscan bronze mirror of the fifth- or fourth-century B.C.E., a long-haired Jason (HEIASUN) emerges from the dragon with sword in his right hand, fleece in his left, surrounded by what appears to be a broad-leaved plant having the shape of a vine and bearing fruit which look like melons.⁶⁰

These are only a few of the iconographic parallels and adaptations. A thorough study of the representations of Jason and Jonah would show in detail in what way century-old images of Jason were attached to Jonah in the first centuries CE. Eventually, though, the Christian messianic interpretations of the Hebrew story asserted their influence and slowly altered the nature and representation of the repertory of stock images.

To conclude, I note that the persistence of these images and themes over the centuries in a wide cultural area is a striking phenomenon. The cultural bonds between Greece and Israel were stronger than has been thought sometimes, although the borrowings were made in all directions and the resulting knots are nearly inextricable. Yet I hope to have shown that situating the stories of Jonah and Jason in the wider context of their Mediterranean matrix enriches their meaning and leads serendipitously to new philological observations. Now, the use of widely scattered mythological themes by the author of the book of Jonah does not necessarily mean that the influence of Greek language and institutions was very deep in Israel, even in the last centuries B.C.E.⁶¹ In fact, the author plays with these heroic stories very much

as he questions the Hebrew prophetic accounts. The book of Jonah might therefore be another chapter in the multisided Jewish resistance to, and fascination with, Hellenistic culture.

NOTES

1. See A. Feuillet, "Les sources du livre de Jonas," *Revue biblique* 54 (1947) 161–86; P.L. Tribble, *Studies in the Book of Jonah* (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia, 1963) 107–8, 110–12; J. Sasson, *Jonah. A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (The Anchor Bible, 24B; New York: Doubleday, 1990) passim.
2. See Sasson, op. cit., pp. 331–40.
3. See A. Feuillet, art. cit., p. 162; E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1967) mentions also the stories of Arion in Herodotus and Heracles' three-day sojourn in a sea cave. A. Feuillet, after reviewing the possibilities, thinks that the results are meager and unimportant. P. Tribble reviews all previous proposals, op. cit., pp. 127–52.
4. The most important work is by H. Schmidt: *Jona. Eine Untersuchung zum vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1907), pp. 22–23. As the title indicates, this is a broad comparative study which, in the opinion of Y. M. Duval (in: *Le livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1973) is carried too far. Flasch, *Angebliche Argonautenbilder* (Munich: F. Straub, 1870); Welcker (*Alle Denkmäler*); Radermacher (*Mythos und Sage bei den Griechen*, Leipzig: R.M. Rohrer, 1938, p. 183; also *Das Jenseits im Mythos der Hellenen*, pp. 67ff.); Kerényi also (in *The Heroes of the Greeks*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1959).
5. Not in Feuillet or in Sasson. The work of H. Schmidt (above, note 4) is not mentioned in J. Sasson's bibliography.
6. Abbreviated as *LIMC* from now on, vol. V, books 1 and 2, see under Jason.
7. J. Sasson speaks of "vestiges of tales" but does not specify their origin (pp. 16–18).
8. A question most recently addressed by W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 1992, about the archaic period. The book appeared in German in 1984.
9. Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes* (M. Van der Valk, Leiden: Brill, vol. 1, 1971, p. 773, lines 15–17).
10. See *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, vol. 3 (1964), p. 179, 9. For Cyrenaica, see index in W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 326. Also: A. Lalonde, "La Cyrénaïque romaine des origines à la fin des Sévères (96 av. J.-C.–235 ap. J.-C.)," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, vol. II/10.1 (1988), p. 1045. Note the names of high priests under Antiochos IV: Onias, then his brother Jason, then Menelas.
11. In Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.
12. See *The New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem/New York: Israel Exploration Society and Carta; Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 751.
13. Apollonius, *Argonautica* 2.317f.; 2.555f. The use of doves may have been a most ancient technique. It is not documented in J. Rougé, *La marine de l'antiquité* (Paris: P.U.F., 1975), or in L. Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974).
14. *Aeneid* 6.190f.
15. Soph. *Trachiniae* 169f.; Servius, *In Aeneidem* 3.466.
16. Bora is still the name of a northern wind coming from Dalmatia and causing storms in the Adriatic Sea: J. Rougé, *La marine de l'antiquité* (Paris: P.U.F., 1975) 24. The Boreads are pictured as winged creatures, often naked, as in *LIMC* III/1 (1986), pp. 126–33.
17. 1 Kings 19.10. The whole story of Elijah is in 1 Kings 18.20–40.
18. AO 1155–77.

19. Herodotus, History 1.4. Parallel evoked by E. Bickerman, among others (see note 3 above).
20. bNedarim 38a; PRE 10. Tradition hesitates about the nature of the payment: Jonah's passage alone, or the value of the entire cargo, a problem evident in the difference between MT and LXX, and which puzzled Jerome. In Ionam 1.3. See Y.M. Duval, *Le livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, vol. 1, 1973) p. 100, n. 158, following L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6, p. 349, n. 28.
21. As noted by J. Sasson, *Jonah* (New York: The Anchor Bible, 1990), 141–42.
22. AO 1157; Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 4.580–91.
23. AO 1159.
24. *Argonautica* 2.172–530.
25. Like Heracles, who fights a sea monster to save Hesione, for instance; see E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible*, p. 11.
26. LIMC V/2 (1990), p. 427, no. 30: seventh-century scene, with Jason long-haired and bearded; p. 428, no. 34.
27. Reproduced in color in P. E. Arias and M. Hirmer, *Le vase grec* (Paris: Flammarion, 1962), fig. 147 (Italian original 1962. Also ET, with marked differences). Also in H. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 23; Kerényi, *The Heroes of the Greeks*, fig. 62; now in LIMC, vol. V/2, p. 428 (fig. Iason 32).
28. Flasch, *Angebliche Argonautenbilder* (Munich: F. Straub, 1870), p. 27.
29. See Laconian iconography, LIMC on Boreadae.
30. *Angebliche Argonautenbilder* (Munich: F. Straub, 1870), chapter 3, p. 25. See also Radermacher, *Das Jenseits im Mythos der Hellenen*, p. 67. But see Welcker, *Alte Denkmäler*, p. 378.
31. "Ships, monsters and Jonah," *American Journal of Archaeology* 66 (1962), 294, pl. 78, fig. 7. She is following E. Pfuhl, *Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen*, vol. 3, Munich (1923) pl. 164, no. 467; and K. Kerényi, *The Heroes of the Greeks* (1959) fig. 62, pp. 264–65, for a commentary on the Cerveteri vase.
32. "A l'intérieur, Athena casquée, armée de l'égide et de la lance, la chouette dans la main droite, assiste, étonnée, à l'approche du héros Jason (*Iason*) qui sort de la gueule ouverte du dragon."
33. P. E. Arias and M. Hirmer, *Le vase grec* (Paris: Flammarion, 1962), fig. 147 and p. 80 for a brief commentary.
34. LIMC II/1 (1984) 975–76; II/2 (1984) No. 187, etc.
35. A fifth to fourth century B.C.E. Greek volute-krater features doves in two trees connected with the Jason story: LIMC V/2 (1990), Iason 17. The Golden Fleece hangs from an olive tree, to the left, and a dragon is coiled around the trunk of an apple tree (?) to the right.
36. Note that Aquila and Theodotion transcribed the word, kikeōna (Sasson, p. 292).
37. Surveyed and evaluated by B.P. Robertson, "Jonah's Qiqayon Plant," ZATW 97 (1985) 390–403.
38. Not in Pindar, but in several passages of the version in Apollonius of Rhodes and in the *Argonautica Orphica*.
39. Note also the tradition of fast-growing trees in the *Argonautica Orphica*.
40. See A. Delatte, "Le Cycéon, breuvage rituel des mystères d'Eleusis," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 32 (1954) 690–748.
41. K. Shepard, *The Fish-Tailed Monster in Greek and Etruscan Art* (New York and Menasha, WI: Privately printed and G. Banta Co., 1940), 4–9, for mermen 10–11, 19, 43–44 for discussion of the origins of Skylla, a sea monster popular in the 5th c. B.C.E. There is no mention of Jonah in this work. See also G. Ahlberg-Cornell, *Heracles and the Sea-Monster in Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painting* (Stockholm: P. Åströms Förlag, 1984), 17, for Near Eastern influence on Greek art in the middle of the 7th c. B.C. This author suspects Corinth had a special role in this cultural transmission in that period. Now see W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution. Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

42. See J. Fontenrose, *Python. A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1959) 121–45, esp. 133–34; 143–45.
43. Fontenrose, *ibid.*, p. 485.
44. On which see G. B. Miles and G. Trompf, “Luke and Antiphon: The Theology of Acts 27–28 in the Light of Pagan Beliefs About Divine Retribution, Pollution, and Shipwreck,” *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (1976) 259–67.
45. For Jason as anti-hero, see G. Lawall, “Apollonius’ Argonautica: Jason as Anti-Hero,” *Yale Classical Studies* 19 (1966) 119–69.
46. Especially J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (1976); D. L. Christensen, “The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985) 217–31.
47. On Jonah as a parody: A. Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), 177–95, who may be exaggerating the comic effect. Band is in substantial agreement with J. Miles especially, M. Burrows, B. Halpern and R. Friedman, J.C. Hulbert, J. Ackerman and others. The parodic interpretation has been strongly opposed by several authors, esp. A. Berlin.
48. Cf. E. Gruen, “Cultural Fictions and Cultural Identity,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993) 1–14.
49. For instance, this is considered the main point of the story in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 580–84.
50. See E. E. Urbach, “Tshuvat anshey Nineveh,” *Tarbiz* 20 (1959) pp. 119–20.
51. Duval, vol 1, p. 77. See F. Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum NT, vol. 61, Mohr: Tübingen, 1992).
52. See E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (1967), pp. 29–33, where he explains the evolution of oracles of doom (*fata denuntiativa*) and conditional prophecies.
53. See important pages in Y. M. Duval, *Le livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine* (Paris: Etudes augustinienes, 1973), esp. pp. 13–19 for texts and 19–39 for figurative art.
54. T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), fig. 13, and pp. 30–31 (following Von Sybel, see Mathews’ note 16). A structurally similar image of Jonah asleep under staked up gourds, with long hair and no beard, appears on a third century (end) fragment of a sarcophagus lid in the Louvre museum: see P. Du Bourguet, *Early Christian Art* (New York: Reynal & Co.; William Morrow & Co., 1971), p. 39.
55. Letter 102.6; see Y. M. Duval, vol. 1, p. 28.
56. Augustine, Letter 102.6.30: “Quod sibi etiam vult supra euomitum Ionam cucurbitam natam?”
57. He mentions the incredible fact that a man could have been swallowed fully clothed by the fish. Nakedness, however, was part of the motif of the shipwrecked victim, and applies to Jason as well as to Jonah.
58. Pyth. 4.82–83.
59. P. Du Bourguet, *Early Christian Art*, p. 109.
60. LIMC V/2 (1990), Iason 35; see also H. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, fig. 5, p. 24.
61. The book was probably written in the fifth or fourth c. B.C.E. But as J. Sasson writes (*op. cit.*, p. 328), this book is not written “in a style favorable to historical inquiry,” and is difficult to date.

The Day Stalin Died

I leaned my back behind the mower:
wooden wheels, thin metal blades in need
of sharpening. Earlier in the day
I was in a spelling bee – stumped
on appetite – forgetting the second P.
After school Kenny Teuton asked me
if it's true that Jews drink blood

on holidays. I looked at his wide face,
large spaces between his teeth. Had he
not asked so innocently, I would have
smashed his lower lip, just like I did
to Frankie Robinson on Lindbergh Street.
Dinner on Thursday was always string beans
and lamb chops. Grandma Katy was there.

She baked potatoes with fried chicken skins
mashed inside. Sunday we'd be visiting
Grandpa Max at the cemetery. I'd taken
a pail of nails and two wagon loads of lumber
for Stephen from Woodfield Road.
Miriam was on the phone with Rhoda
Stopnick. I turned the Dumont on.

Edward R. Murrow was talking
with a cigarette dangling from his mouth.
I heard my father come home. I was supposed
to be doing homework. Instead,
I was reading Freddie The Pig. Freddie
had just unionized all the animals
and was planning a non-violent protest in town.

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19332

First it was breakfast in Barbados, now
next to me on the beach in Mayereau.
Maybe if I concentrate on the emerald water;
nineteen sailboats in the bay, thirty three
wind surfers. I stop, realizing the symmetry.
The numbers: a blue black tattoo, so clear

over fifty years later. And, when I talk
to her, she swings the left suntanned forearm
around – numbers in full view. She asks me
what I do, where I live – about my
children. I say: doctor – New York – two.
There's the symmetry again. Such a low

number, meaning she was taken early.
She tells me her age; captured at age nineteen,
I calculate. The forearm flashes again. Nineteen
sailboats. She sees me staring. The world
comes full circle, she says, pointing. Everything
has meaning. This number was meant to survive.

Two men behind me playing steel drums . . .

Jonah's Journey

DAVID ZUCKER

JONAH IS A DIFFICULT CHARACTER. FIRST HE RUNS AWAY from God. Then, asleep, he is indifferent to the plight of his fellow shipmates. The prophet endures a strange, even bizarre voyage in the depths of the sea. When Jonah finally gets to Nineveh, he grudgingly delivers his prophetic message. He resents their repentance and finally is moody and irascible in his comments to God.

Thus the Biblical Jonah. Yet when we consider the many comments about Jonah found in aggadic sources, another picture emerges. Though there are exceptions, on the whole the “rabbinic Jonah” is portrayed in a more positive light.

Finding different explanations or motivations for what a Biblical character does (often contrary to the plain meaning of the text) is not without rabbinic precedent. David Goldstein reminds us that the rabbis wanted to bring their congregations “nearer to the sacred text of Scripture by planting within [their] heart[s], through story and interpretation, a love of the personalities of the Bible, a greater realization of the . . . teaching of God, and a deeper understanding of the destiny of Israel.”¹ Thus it is not surprising to find Jonah a frequent visitor in midrashim from the first through the tenth centuries.²

The opening words of Jonah explain that God has called upon him to go to Nineveh “at once . . . to proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness” has come to God’s attention.³ Unlike some of his predecessors including Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, Jonah does not pause to suggest to the Almighty reasons for not accepting this commission.⁴ He rather turns and heads in the opposite direction. This suppression of prophecy does not go unnoticed in the rabbinic literature. In early texts, namely the *Sifre* to Deuteronomy as well as the *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*,⁵ both compiled by the end of the second century C.E., Jonah is severely criticized for his actions. The *Mekilta* explains that the prophet purposely withheld honor due to God while seeking honor for himself. For this transgression, God limits Jonah’s prophetic message.⁶

In midrashim of a later age, primarily between the seventh and tenth centuries, a different view of Jonah prevails. Here, Jonah’s repression of prophecy is effectively ignored and though God will make an object lesson of Jonah, the prophet is not reprimanded as in the earlier texts. Presenting

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Jonah in a more positive light may have countered his co-option by the early Christian church. In the Christian Scriptures there is reference to the "Sign of Jonah" which was understood by the Church as precedent for preaching among "despised Gentiles" or as prefiguring the Resurrection of Jesus.⁷ Likewise the rabbis may have wished to counteract the Patristic teachings about Jonah. "The Church fathers accepted the Jewish interpretation but turned it against its authors." Ephraem Syrus (4th cent.), Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (5th cent.), and Jerome (5th cent.), among others, used Jonah as a polemic against the Jews. "Nineveh believed, says Jerome, but incredulous Israel persists in refusing to acknowledge Jesus."⁸ Jonah's shipwreck for Jerome suggests the Passion of Jesus who called the entire world to penitence: and in the name of Nineveh, Jonah as a type of Christ proclaims salvation to all the Gentiles.⁹

Another opportunity to explore Jonah's message was the result of its reading as the Haftorah for Yom Kippur afternoon. Presumably preachers in the synagogue expounded on the Jonah narrative. Midrashic collections like the narrative *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* and the homiletical *Midrash Tanhuma*, compiled between 640–900 C.E.,¹⁰ reflect such habits of thought.

Whether it was to counteract Christian teaching and/or to bring their congregations "nearer to the sacred text of Scripture" new insights exploring Jonah's motivation became part of rabbinic tradition. They were not developed in systematic fashion. Nevertheless, viewing these writings as a collective whole, punctuated in a number of cases by wonderful ironies, certain issues emerge, which lead to ten ways of viewing Jonah.¹¹

1. God's Presence Is Found Throughout the World

Jonah opts for a sea voyage to escape, explain the rabbis, because he assumes God is sovereign merely over heaven and earth, not the watery depths. He feels safe from divine retribution on the billowing waves.¹² He would soon learn the error of his ways. To teach those lessons to (and through) Jonah, no less a figure than God is co-opted by the rabbis to help facilitate the prophet's plan of escape. In one midrash collection it explains that the ship on which Jonah seeks to reach Tarshish had left port two days previously. What did the Holy One do? God causes a storm on the Mediterranean; the ship returns to shore. Seeing this come about, who could blame Jonah for assuming that this was a sign of divine approval, or at the very least, that his retreat from responsibility was *not* seen as a sign of divine *disapproval*?

2. God Will Not Abandon Israel Even When They Are Rebellious

Jonah misinterprets the return of the ship to the port at Jaffa. He says (unbeknownst to himself, ironically) "now I know that my ways will prosper."¹³ He could not anticipate a later, rabbinic insight into the attributes of God which says even if Israel is rebellious, I will not abandon them.¹⁴

3. Jonah Does Not Want to Appear as a False Prophet

Jonah flees towards Tarshish because he fears that were he to carry the message to Nineveh, *he would be believed!* Those foreigners *would* repent and then once again he would be labeled as a false prophet, one who predicts something that does not materialize. Earlier Jonah prophesied that Jerusalem would suffer punishment. At the last moment the people repented and God relented. Consequently Jonah was called a “lying prophet.” He has no desire to relive that experience.¹⁵ There was the shame of being inappropriately maligned, and it was doubly galling, and painfully ironic, for his patronym, Amittai, can be translated as “the one who speaks truth,” based on its root letters in Hebrew: Amittai is derived from the word *Emet*—“truth.”¹⁶

4. Jonah as Israel's Friend

In the relatively late midrashic collections the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* and the *Midrash Tanhuma*, an additional explanation, or possibly a rationalization, is offered as to why Jonah decides to flee. Jonah is a patriot: he fears that God will compare Israel unfavorably to the Ninevites. If pagans can repent, how much more should Israel do. This point was taken up in the earlier *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah*,¹⁷ where God comments that it took only one prophet to convince Nineveh, but Israel and Judah have resisted the call of every prophet and seer.

Jonah's desire to defend Israel is also demonstrated by his willingness to be consigned to the deep. He assumes he will die in the sea. Better this than living and going on to Nineveh. As noted earlier, Jonah's refusal to honor God's command does bring rabbinic censure. Furthermore in the *Mekilta* Rabbi Natan scathingly refers to Jonah's “voyage” and suggests that the only reason the prophet took this journey was to commit suicide in the sea. Though not stated explicitly Jonah stands doubly condemned, he suppresses prophecy and on top of that chooses voluntarily to take his life!¹⁸

5. The Sea Itself Is Considered to Be a Metaphor for Repentance

That much of the action in Jonah is set on the sea is not without its own sense of irony. In rabbinic thought, prayer is likened to a bath, and repentance to the sea. “As the bath is sometimes open and sometimes shut, so the gates of prayer are sometimes shut and sometimes open, but as the sea is always open, so the gates of repentance are always open.”¹⁹ It is within the sea, more literally within the fish that is swimming in the sea, that Jonah finally does repent. This special quality of the sea as a metaphor for repentance is particularly ironic given Jonah's reasoning in an earlier midrash that God has no power over the sea.

6. God's Prophets Are Righteous, They Are Not Without Imperfections

The Jonah who is tossed into the tempest is clearly tainted with guilt. The rabbis lose no time in reminding us that while he may be censurable, while he is not innocent, nonetheless great and remarkable events are going to take place.

This is not merely *any* fish that swallows Jonah, it is a fish that has been designated for this task from the beginning of time. The *Midrash on Psalms* explains that when God created the universe the angels asked, What are humans that You are mindful of them? (Psalm 8:5). God replies by showing “the angels the excellence of the deeds of the righteous.” Among other righteous characters such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David—all who are not without some faults—specific mention is made of Jonah.²⁰

The Midrashic literature subtly reinforces Jonah’s righteousness. It explains that in that fish’s belly a “pearl was suspended . . . and it gave illumination to Jonah, like the sun . . . and it showed to Jonah all that was in the sea and in the depths.” The Biblical proof-text for this assertion is taken from Psalm 97:11: “light is sown for the righteous.”²¹

7. Jonah’s Role May Well Extend Past the Prophecy at Nineveh, There Will Be Later Tasks for Him, Possibly Messianic

In the belly of the great fish, righteous Jonah is shown a variety of special places including the path that the Israelites took when they fled through the sea; the pillars of the earth; the depths of Sheol and Gehinnom; and the Foundation Stone of the world. Jonah also meets the Leviathan. He tells this monstrous creature that in a time to come, he will come back to ensnare it and prepare it as part of the messianic banquet. Though not spelled out as such, this probably is a suggestion that Jonah is a forerunner of the Messiah ben Joseph who will precede the Messiah ben David.²²

8. God Wants Us to Realize Our Life’s Mission

In the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Rabbi Tarfon is credited with the explanation that Jonah’s fish had been created specially during the days of creation. This same Tannaitic rabbi is known for his maxim that “the day is short, and the work is great . . . the Owner of the house is urgent. . . . Further, it is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”²³ Therefore, in this account, by the time that Jonah was about to be thrown overboard he was cognizant of the fact that God’s glory fills not only heaven and earth, but the sea as well. In the *Midrash Tanhuma* this is spelled out, for Jonah says “I had thought that God’s glory was not over the sea, but now I see that it is over sea and dry land.” Jonah knows he is a marked man; yet he remains reluctant to go to Nineveh. The episode inside the great fish allows him to procrastinate. On this fabulous tour of the deep, he becomes distracted and loses sight of the fact that there is work to be done. The *Zohar* wonderfully addresses this lapse of memory on Jonah’s part by having God rhetorically ask: “Was it for this that I brought you in here?” According to this source God immediately kills the great fish and far from being protected in the deep, Jonah now realizes he is in dire straits because other fish are gnawing at the sides of his vessel. In fear for his life Jonah prays to God who then brings the fish back to life! A delightful variation of this theme

places Jonah within the great fish in the depths of the sea. He is situated directly below the Temple in Jerusalem. Jonah then asks the fish to keep from moving because he wishes to pray. The fish obliges and Jonah offers up the prayer found in the book of Jonah, chapter two.²⁴ In this variation of the conditions for Jonah's prayer, God listens and then when Jonah refers to his future (messianic) activity to catch the Leviathan, God instructs the fish to spew up Jonah.

9. Repentance Has a Great Value in Its Own Right, But It Must Be True Repentance

The third and final chapters of the Biblical book of Jonah center on his time in Nineveh. They recount his warning prophecy, the Ninevites' quick response, and then Jonah's less than gracious reaction. The power of repentance, and the fact that both humans and beasts take on the clothes of repentance are duly noted by the rabbis. Likewise the actions of the Ninevites are cited as an example that good deeds bring repentance.²⁵ The rabbis, however, wished to show that Jonah's instincts really were correct! He was reluctant to go to Nineveh, and even after he saw their repentance, Jonah takes no joy at their change of heart. Certainly the Ninevites were in need of repentance. According to rabbinic sources they were writing fraudulent contracts and deeds, robbing their neighbors, and committing sodomy. Further, their ruler was none other than Pharaoh from the time of the Exodus. What happened? While they did repent, after forty years they returned not only to their evil ways, but to worse deeds yet.

This recidivistic action by Nineveh, its return to sin-filled living, may explain the essential rabbinic silence about Jonah's rude behavior in chapter four. In that chapter Jonah frets about his own life; is gently rebuked by God; he is protected by the gourd created by God; then following the gourd's destruction he again frets about his own life; and is once more rebuked by God. Should you wonder what happened to the Ninevites, according to these rabbis they were swallowed up and are now in Sheol. And Jonah? While the Biblical book would seem to leave Jonah at Nineveh, there is a tradition that he did return to the land of Israel.²⁶

10. While the Righteous Are Rewarded, If Not Now, Then in the World to Come, Some People Earn Special Privileges

For the rabbis, the righteous are deserving of reward. Though life may be difficult here, there will be abundant rewards in the world to come. Certain personages, however, are rewarded even earlier. Among these select few are Jonah. In the *Midrash to Psalms* it states unambiguously that not only was Jonah "completely righteous" but that he merited special recognition for his deeds. "Jonah the son of Amittai, was a completely righteous man. He was tried when the fish swallowed him and was tried again in the depths of the sea, but he did not die . . . so that Jonah, while still alive, entered into his glory, into the Garden of Eden."²⁷ This also hints at Jonah's possibility as the future Messiah.

Our journey parallels Jonah's through the ages. On the level of the basic Biblical text, Jonah is a difficult character. He runs from responsibility; when he is returned to duty, he reluctantly utters God's prophecy; he then is disappointed when evil-doers repent. How fortunate then to be able to learn of Jonah through the eyes of the rabbis who are able to find in—or read into—the actions of this prophet many wonderful messages. The rabbinic Jonah may be flawed, but he has many redeeming virtues.

NOTES

1. David Goldstein, *Jewish Folklore and Legend* (London and New York: Hamlyn, 1980), 12–13. See also Barry Holtz who suggests that where the Bible is laconic “Midrash comes to fill in the gaps, to tell us the details that the Bible teasingly leaves out. . . . Midrash is filled with explanation. . . . The human mind desires answers, motivations, explanations. Where the Bible is mysterious and silent, Midrash comes to unravel the mystery.” Barry W. Holtz, ed., *Back to the Sources* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 180.
2. The collections that contain significant material on Jonah that fit into this time sequence include the *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Midrash Jonah*. Dating of works follows the article on “Midrash” in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11:1511–1512 (New York: Macmillan; Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).
3. All quotations from the Jewish Scriptures are taken from *TANAKH: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: Jewish Publications Society, 1985).
4. Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all demur, at least initially, from serving as prophets: Exodus 3:11 ff, 4:1 ff; Isaiah 6:4; Jeremiah 1:6.
5. *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary to the Book of Deuteronomy*, Reuven Hammer, trans. (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1986), *Piska* 177. There it notes that the death of one who suppresses prophecy is “in the hands of heaven.” See also *Mishna Sanhedrin* 11.5 and Talmud Bavli (the Babylonian Talmud, hereafter B.T.), *Sanhedrin*, 89a. *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael* [hereafter *Mekilta*], Jacob Z. Lauderbach, trans., intro., notes (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1976), *Pisha* 1.73–105. All quotations from the *Mekilta* will be listed by the appropriate lines in *Pisha* 1.
6. *Mekilta* lines 100–103.
7. Matthew 12:38–41; Luke 11:29–32. Preaching to the “despised Gentiles,” comment on Matthew 12:38–42: *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Matthew Black, H. H. Rowley, eds. (London: Nelson, 1967), 785.
8. Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1967) 16. The “church fathers, in contrast to the rabbis, argued that Jonah wanted by his prophecy to the Ninevites to teach a lesson to the stubborn Jews, and thus found in Jonah precedent and support for missions to the gentiles.” Michael Fishbane, “Jonah,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1987).
9. Jerome, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 6: Saint Jerome*, Letter 53.8. For a discussion of Jonah as a prefiguration of Jesus, see the extended discussion in R. H. Bowers, *The Legend of Jonah* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 20 ff.
10. See B. T. *Megilla* 31a which lists Jonah as a Haftorah reading for Yom Kippur. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* [hereafter *PRE*], An English translation, with annotations, introduction and notes, is published under the title *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Gerald Friedlander, trans. (New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1981), Chapter 10; *Midrash Tanhuma* [hereafter *Tanhuma*], *Vayikra*, 8. Many of the midrashim about Jonah also appear in *Bet HaMidrash* in the section “*Midrash Jonah*,” Adolph Jellinick, ed. (Leipzig and Vienna, 1853–1877. Republished Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), 96–105 [Hebrew]. The *Midrash Jonah* was compiled during the years 640–900.
11. It may be that in putting together aggadic statements from different eras this article is creating a “modern Midrash.” My reading of the texts, and the categories I offer are reflective of the late 20th century. I do not claim that the rabbis either saw Jonah exactly in the rubrics listed below or

that they would necessarily have understood Jonah in this light. Nonetheless the past speaks to the present. Jacob Neusner has observed, "the sages of Judaism . . . show us . . . choices that we can make our own, modes of thought that, properly modified to accommodate the intellectual requirements of our own circumstance, prove remarkably pertinent." Jacob Neusner, *A Midrash Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 6.

12. *PRE* Chapter 10; *Tanhuma*, and *Midrash Jonah*. The respective "prooftexts" for God's presence limited to the earth and heaven are, respectively, Psalm 113:4 and Isaiah 6:3. In the *Mekilta* which is much more critical of Jonah's actions, a completely different set of verses is offered: Psalm 139:7 ff; Zechariah 4:10; Proverbs 15:3; Amos 9:2-4 and Job 24:22. It is true that Psalm 139:9 speaks of *b'aharit yam* which can be translated as "the uttermost part of the sea." The JPS TANAKH translation as "the western horizon" comes closer to the sense of the context in which it is used in the *Mekilta* for Jonah goes on to say "I will go outside of the Land [of Israel] where God's presence [Shekhina] does not reveal itself" (*aylech li hutza la-aretz makom she-ayn ha-shechina niglayt*) (lines 80-81). The "western horizon" then would be, so to say, at the eastern edges of the Mediterranean, not at the "uttermost part of the sea."

13. *PRE* Chapter 10; *Tanhuma* Chapter 8. In *Midrash Jonah* the irony is even more complete. He says "now I know that my ways are agreeable before God" (*akshav ani yodea she-darkai yashar lifney HKB*)¹¹.

14. *Midrash Exodus Rabbah* 3.2.

15. *PRE* Chapter 10; *Tanhuma*. The midrash here understands Jonah's comment (in Jonah 4:2) that "Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country?" refers to Jonah's earlier prophecy to Jerusalem which brought about their change of heart, and therefore God's repenting of the decree to punish Jerusalem. Earlier Philo had dealt with Jonah's quandary and some Patristics likewise deal with the prophet's problem that he knows that his warning will be heeded! See Bickerman, 33 ff. Gregory of Nazianzen, Bishop of Constantinople [4th cent.] explains that part of Jonah's desire to escape was that he feared "lest he appear an absurd prophet to the Ninevites, and be discovered a liar by a Nineveh later redeemed from danger through penitence." Quoted in Bowers, (citing PG 35:505) 31, n. 44.

16. *Emet* (*aleph-mem-taf*) is actually derived from the root *aleph-mem-nun*. See F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford UP, 1962), 54.

17. *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah*, Proems, 31. *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* is compiled between 400-650 C.E. Its time frame falls well within the life and preaching of Jerome who (as explained above) said, "Nineveh believed but incredulous Israel persists in refusing to acknowledge Jesus." See Bickerman, 16.

18. *PRE* Chapter 10, *Tanhuma*. Rabbi Natan's remarks about Jonah, *Mekilta* lines 103-104.

19. *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* 3.43.9 (comment on Lamentations 3:43); see also *The Midrash on Psalms* 65.4.

20. *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 5.5; *The Midrash on Psalms*, 8.7; see also *PRE* Chapter 10.

21. *PRE* Chapter 10, *Tanhuma*.

22. *PRE*, Chapter 10, *Tanhuma*. Jonah as forerunner or as the Messiah: see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1968), Vol. 6, notes 31 and 38; *Tanna Debe Eliyyahu*, William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, trans. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1981), Chapter 18, 257, n. 59 (*Eliyyahu Rabbah* 98).

23. *PRE* Chapter 10. "The day is short . . .": *Pirke Avot* 2.15-16 (in some editions 2.20-21). Did Rabbi Tarfon really suggest that the fish was created specially for Jonah? Probably not. According to the article on the *PRE* in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, this eighth century aggadic work "falsely attributes sayings to many *tannaim*" and in fact the *PRE* is described as "a pseudepigraphic work par excellence" (Vol. 13:559). Coincidentally in *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 5.5 it is Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eleazar (Amora: c. 250-300) who is credited with the observation about the fish and Jonah.

24. *Tanhuma*; *Zohar*, Exodus 47b-48a; *PRE* Chapter 10.

25. *PRE* Chapter 43; *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, 44.12; *Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, 3.18.1; *Pesikta Rabbati*, *Piska* 52.3.

26. *PRE* Chapter 43; the tradition that Jonah returned to Israel, however, is not rabbinic. It is found in the pseudepigraphic work 3 Macabees 6:8, and in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 9 Chapter 10.

27. *The Midrash to Psalms*, 26.7

From All Their Habitations

On Yom Kippur

FRANCES DEGEN HOROWITZ

SHORTLY AFTER SUNRISE ON A LUCID MORNING LATE IN June 1973, my family and I stood on the deck of a Zim passenger ship straining our eyes to catch our very first glimpse of Israel. The ship was making its way toward land in a calm and glistening sea, betraying little of the several previous days of an uncommonly rough Mediterranean crossing from Marseilles to Haifa. On that quiet summer morning, the sea sickness behind us, now full of excitement and expectation, we had no way of knowing that the turbulent crossing would, in retrospect, seem prophetic of the sabbatical year we had come to take up in Israel.

During our first two months in Israel we were in residence in Ulpan Akiva in Netanya rising to the challenge of acquiring modern Hebrew to ready ourselves for the year ahead. Early in September of 1973, we settled comfortably into an apartment in Rehovot, across town from Beit Holim Kaplan, where I was to do research in pediatrics.

The early autumn in 1973 was full of coolness and brilliant sun. We quickly became accustomed to the rhythms of life in Rehovot and after a few weeks were eager for the experience of spending the High Holidays in Israel. Rosh Hashanah certainly did not disappoint. As on Shabbat, a *yontivdick* atmosphere prevailed—in sharp contrast to the tumult of everyday life in Israel.

I looked forward to Yom Kippur. I knew that for a period of twenty-five hours we could expect an experience of quietude and contemplation. I knew that the radio and television would be silent, that no cars would move and that even the secular would defer to the day. The prospect recalled warm memories of my childhood in the Bronx where on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, in my Jewish neighborhood, the kosher butcher and the appetizing store and Rosoff's pharmacy and the corner candy store would all be closed. Quiet, still. Only the coming and going to services, a couple of blocks to the more mannered synagogue with my father, across the street into the little *stiebele shul* that my grandmother preferred, to nestle against her and sink myself into an atmosphere saturated with the sounds of melody and prayerful mumbling.

Yom Kippur in Israel held the promise of once again living wholly in only one quiet, contemplative world for an unbroken period of time. In such expectation we set out to walk to Kol Nidre services with a sense of some abandon, striding down the very middle of Rehov Herzl, no need to be wary of cars or buses. But then a jeep came by. And soon another. We continued on the sidewalk.

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Perhaps, I thought, those reports of Yom Kippur in Israel as a national day of total solemnity were more romance than reality. During services the congregation was restive at the sounds of motor activity reaching us through the open windows. Afterwards, walking home, we could see some people scurrying about, a few uniforms here and there.

By morning, of course, we knew it was war. The radio silence was broken and we hung on Chaim Herzog's reassuring words during the frequent English-language broadcast updates, Ulpan Akiva notwithstanding. That Yom Kippur afternoon we took refuge for the first time in the shelter of the apartment house with a sense of the meaning of collective vulnerability. In the ensuing days, trying not to comprehend all the possible outcomes, we took hope from the swoosh of the bomb-laden planes just over the roof of our house as sortie after sortie made its way to Egypt.

It was not to be—this living wholly in only one world on Yom Kippur—as it had not been for the many years since my Bronx childhood. And not ever again, back in America where, short of isolating oneself in a geographical enclave, living wholly in only one world on *yontiv* is no longer physically possible as much as one might wish for such a world: the better to hear the melodies of the synagogue, the better to wrestle with the meaning of the day.

I have always struggled with Yom Kippur. I have always found it an especially difficult day. It is not the fasting, nor the hours in synagogue, nor the repetitiveness of the ritual. Rather, it is the substance of the day—the responsibility to consider issues of tefillah, teshuvah, and tzedakah. For the “*Al chet she-chatanu lifanecho*: For the sin we have committed before thee, by doing, by being.” For the “*ve-al kulom, elo-hay selichos, selach-lanu, mechal-lanu, kaper-lanu*: For all these, O Adonai of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement”; for the power and mysticism of these words, against the intrusion of the sights and sounds of cars and buses and the normal bustling of people going about their daily chores and commerce—signifying the several worlds in which we normally dwell. But these several worlds turn on us as they jar our Yom Kippur sensibilities, and we find ourselves juxtaposing the inclination toward inward solemnity and dwelling on the meaning of Yom Kippur with outward encounters in the ongoing world about us.

I remember a number of years ago, as I was leaving campus early one erev Yom Kippur to prepare for Kol Nidre, a non-Jewish colleague of mine made a special effort to stop me and wish me a cheery, happy holiday. What to do? Happy guilt and repentance? Happy sin and forgiveness? Short of a discussion of Yom Kippur's capacity for generating the happiness of serenity, I shared with him more apt alternative phrases in a gentle but hasty attempt to deepen our friendship a little bit, and then went off to take up the ritual encounter with the solemnity that is Yom Kippur. As Agnon reminds us, it is a day characterized in the Talmud as a time when “we draw the sanctity of the superior realm down nearer to us. Ten days of Teshuvah are for the drawing upward from earth to heaven; on Yom Kippur, the superior realm draws down from heaven nearer to Israel.”¹

How many different ways there are of thinking about and characterizing Yom Kippur. From Leviticus, as we read in the traditional Yom Kippur Torah portion, on this sabbath day of solemn rest, atonement is granted and we are cleansed of all our sins; from Isaiah, our words are not deemed sufficient, only our deeds will do. Philo considered it a day to purify the heart without distraction;²

Joseph Soloveichik saw Yom Kippur as a day when sin is not so much to be removed as exploited—to be used as a “spiritual springboard for increased inspiration and evaluation.” Our relationship to sin, he noted, is, therefore, not for supernatural purposes but must serve as an entrance into psychological experience.³ And then there is Arthur Waskow’s allegorizing view of Yom Kippur: “Yom Kippur,” he says, “becomes a kind of tallis in time—a prayer shawl to cover the confusions of the year.”⁴

Yom Kippur is full of the thought of deeds, real and imagined. Here is the casting of lots—one goat to be sacrificed to appease Adonai and one goat to be sent to Azazel, to appease demon spirits, providing for the transportation for our sins to keep them, like Tevye’s tsar, far away from us, never to return. And there are the penitential acts in expiation of real sins committed. And the metaphorical explanations for what it is we are doing this whole night and day long, locked in ritualistic renditions of words and melodies.

Some of us are comfortable with the literal, willing to engage an anthropomorphic God. Others suspend reason in service of a Jewish form of confession that Robert Milich calls “normal mysticism,” where our communal confession permits us to have, together, a transporting spiritual experience in contrast to seeking the more individualized forms of spirituality of other religions.⁵

Still—Yom Kippur is, for many, philosophically and psychologically more difficult than any other Jewish holiday or observance. Perhaps it is because Yom Kippur is practically bereft of the multiple and successive opportunities typical of other Jewish holidays that are full of devices to grow us up over the years into the deeper meanings of their tradition and observance. Unlike Purim and Chanukah, there is no narrative to be rendered at a more simple level for children, which then naturally progresses to more complex interpretation as one enters into adult status. Unlike Passover, there is no ritual for the telling of a story. On Yom Kippur there is no dreidel, no menorah, no *grager*-noisemaker, no Spiel or ball. The physical devices of other holidays are not available to ease us into observance. Neither are there actions—planting trees, or sitting in booths, or a day full of the eating of special foods. Yom Kippur is an observance of the synagogue and not of the home, deriving as it does from the time of the Mishkan. Yom Kippur’s only physical symbol for children and adults alike, is the Shofar with its haunting, magical sounds. But unlike Rosh Hashanah, when there are many soundings of the shofar, on Yom Kippur we hear it only once—as conclusion.

Yom Kippur is at once the most cerebral of our observances and for many, the most emotional if not irrational. And yet, as a day of solemnity, as a day full of haunting melodies, as a day full of the potential for the seamless experience of living wholly in only one world, Yom Kippur can stir up deep and powerful and disturbing emotions.

Each year I wrestle with Yom Kippur—the two worlds of the rational and the spiritual tugging one at the other. Slowly a view has come into focus that has provided some relief for the struggle and that permits me the emotional freedom to dwell wholly in only one world on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur, I have come to accept, is a day in my Jewish life that can be thought of as being about a set of parallel equations: One equation is person to person and the obligations for rectifying wrong; the other equation is person and community to the larger society, with the obligation to contribute to the function of rectifying those wrongs that disturb and

perturb an ethical system. Here, for me, the entirely communal context for defining Jewish ethics becomes a brilliant social construction which recognizes that an ethical force is more likely to prevail when it operates as a gloss of communal influence as opposed to individually defined efforts and actions. Both of these equations, defined in a Jewish context, must be seen as ever subject to evolving as times change and as new circumstances arise. On Yom Kippur, by living wholly in one world for a day, I make a whole out of these equations.

It is not unreasonable to ask what makes it necessary to have a solemn day of prayer for Yom Kippur. Would not a good discussion group suffice? It could be scheduled once a year, perhaps with a fast to emphasize the seriousness of the endeavor. Then we could dispense with the *Al chet* and *shema kolanu*, with *teshuvah*, *tzedekah*, and *tefillah*, with days of awe, and the writing and sealing in books. Would that not keep the essence of Yom Kippur while dispensing with the baggage of faith?

For those Jews who find it hard to relate to the ritual Yom Kippur, would this insure a commitment to ethical community and continuity, as Jews? And might such a commitment be sustainable, generation to generation, *l'dor v'dor*—without ritual tradition and a sense of heritage and history. There would be no dipping into Tanach and Talmud and no access to mystical and the irrational, no opportunity to engage cosmic process, as Farber has argued, by thinking of *teshuvah* as an act of creation. Nor would there be the possibility of an act of ethical creation, which he equates with Susan Langer's notion of a commanding form, an inner vision, an experience with the intuitive click.⁶

On Yom Kippur, as on no other day, we can live wholly in only one world, the better to create for ourselves the emotional cerebral tallis in time. On the seamless day of Yom Kippur we can walk with abandon right down the middle through the ethical thickets of our lives, not in search of individual salvation but in a quest for communal commitment to reinforce the possibility of a cosmic ethical harmony. To live wholly in only one world on Yom Kippur so that we may live more effectively in the many worlds of all our other days.

NOTES

1. S. Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 188–89.
2. Philo, quoted in *The Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 1382.
3. P. Goodman, "The Jewish Concept of Teshuvah," by Joseph Soloveichik, *The Yom Kippur Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), pp. 142–146.
4. A. Waskow, *Seasons of Our Joy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), p. 27.
5. R. Milch, "Jewish Confession as Normal Mysticism," *Judaism* 37 (1988), 359–63.
6. R. Farber, "Teshuvah: Act of Creation," *Midstream*, 3 (October 1993): 28–31.

Writing Religious History

Review Essay by WILLIAM NICHOLLS

HOW DO WE WRITE RELIGIOUS HISTORY? ARE WE CAUGHT WITHOUT RECOURSE BETWEEN the alternatives of fundamentalism and complete disbelief in the historical foundations of our religions? These questions are raised by Norman Cantor's *The Sacred Chain*, a book claiming to be an up-to-date account of the whole of Jewish history.¹

The innocent reader will learn a number of remarkable things from this book, should he or she take it at its own valuation. Among them are the following: All biblical history before the time of the monarchy is romantic fiction, without "a shred" of empirical basis. Although anti-Semitism is a reality, and one that the author does not minimize, nevertheless, Jews have always been in large measure responsible for their own misfortunes. Only about forty thousand Jews left Spain at the Expulsion in 1492, while the majority of the conversos were sincere in embracing Christianity. Many classical Jewish texts, such as the *Kuzari* of Yehuda ha-Levi, are boring and nearly unreadable. The *Kuzari* is racist, but then so is the Bible, some of its most characteristic ideas being "blatantly racist"; but Cantor also believes that Jews have inherently superior genes. The traditional liturgy is jejune, as well as at least three times too long. Judaism has yet to come to terms with modernity, let alone post-modernity; however, there is no hope whatsoever of the rabbis (of any movement) accomplishing this feat, which would need at least ten thinkers of the caliber of Maimonides. The odds are that the Jewish people will lose their distinctive identity in the course of the next century, whether in America or in Israel. However, though a cause for sadness, this does not ultimately matter because the Jewish people have already fulfilled their historical destiny by spawning two world religions, Christianity and Islam, and doing most of the creative work of bringing about modernity and post-modernity.

One of Cantor's often repeated claims is that these contentions rest upon a superior historical method; however, it is not entirely clear from his book what that method is. He likes to use the word empirical, yet flirts with deconstructionism, which is grounded in a very different philosophical outlook. Perhaps most consistently, he deploys a sociological approach to historical data in which the form and historical development of Jewish society is regarded as mainly determined by its supposed power relationships. While such a method will incontestably lead to historical insights unattainable without it, the sociology he practices in this book is

1. Norman F. Cantor, *The Sacred Chain: The History of the Jews* (New York: Harper/Collins, 1994), xviii.

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clearly inadequate for a full account of religious history. In fact, much of the difficulty of writing religious history arises from the fact that only an interdisciplinary approach can hope to do justice to its complexity.

Cantor is clearly much more at home in the world of modern ideas and scholarship than he is with traditional Judaism. For him, newer seems to be unconditionally better. The Jewish past, whether historical or literary, halakhic or mystical, is all discredited by modernity. Indeed, if there is a common theme running through the book, it seems to be that everything more traditional Jews revere or respect is a myth to be exploded. Cantor's immense self-confidence seems to include contempt for all who disagree with him or who embrace a more traditional approach.

His judgments rest on insufficient knowledge. His acquaintance with philosophy, for example, or spirituality and Kabbalah (for which he prefers the Christian spelling Cabala, for some reason) is not, on the evidence of this book, above the undergraduate level. The post-Hegelian Franz Rosenzweig, for example, is characterized as a neo-Kantian along with Hermann Cohen. The account of Kabbalah shows little evidence of Cantor's claimed debt to Gershom Scholem; it might easily have been written by a disciple of Graetz, for whom not surprisingly Cantor has the greatest admiration. Otherwise, he appears to read Scholem through Harold Bloom, who, incidentally, is treated as a major biblical scholar, along with another amateur in that particular field, Robin Lane Fox. Cantor similarly displays his up-to-dateness by dispensing entirely with footnotes and references for his few quotations. His practice has little to do with empirical or historical scholarship, which is concerned with evidence and what may legitimately be concluded from it: his practice amounts to an intellectual confidence trick.

When it comes to biblical scholarship, Cantor goes right out on a limb. His dogmatic statement that there is not a shred of empirical evidence to support the biblical account of Israel's origins appears to be based on the total exclusion of literary evidence; he relies upon archaeology alone. Whether or not it is correct to call this procedure empirical, all such sweeping statements are vulnerable to new discoveries. Even if the statement had been true—within its limitations—at the time it was made, it seems not to be true now.

A few days after Cantor's book arrived, I picked up the current copy of that remarkable and informative publication, *Biblical Archaeology Review*. It contained among other things an important article by the eminent British scholar Kenneth Kitchen, on the historicity of the patriarchal age.² Kitchen gave very strong, and impeccably empirical, reasons for believing that important details of the stories of the patriarchs corresponded exactly to the situation of the time of the patriarchs, and not to the much later time when the stories were supposedly written. Indeed, though this was not his brief, he went on to do some of the same thing for the period of the Exodus. Kitchen reminds us that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." Of course, this is far from "proving the truth of the Bible." That something could have happened does not mean that it did. But it should give us a respect for the value of the ancient traditions embedded in the Bible.

2. Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21, no. 2 (March/April 1995).

An issue of a rather different kind is Cantor's treatment of anti-Semitism. Here he treads on extremely dangerous ground. I do not doubt the sincerity of his condemnation of Christian and secular anti-Semitism, but in his attempt (characteristic of the book) to show that Jews were also to blame for their misfortunes, he comes close to furnishing a rational justification for some degree of anti-Semitism. I am convinced that we shall never understand anti-Semitism correctly unless we abandon this type of explanation once and for all. Anti-Semitism is causeless hate, and the reasons given for it are always rationalizations at best, or even dishonest excuses. Jewish faults should be a matter for internal self-criticism; discussion of them should be firmly separated from any treatment of anti-Semitism. Otherwise those who are too ready to demonize the Jews will be reinforced in their conviction that these faults are unique. None of the faults and errors, real or questionable, that Cantor brings forward can explain or justify anti-Semitism as it really was and still is.

A remarkable example of this procedure, which is also characteristic of his methods, is his treatment of the troubles of the Provençal Jews with the Dominican Inquisition during the struggles of the church with the Albigensians or Cathari.³ Cantor claims that "[t]he Jews were not entirely innocent victims within the religious structure of southern France, nor was the inquisitorial friars' attack on them idiosyncratic and fortuitous."⁴ As usual, no documentation is given for this hardly empirical claim. Instead, he tells us that it is "likely" that the intellectual roots of the Catharist heresy lie in "Jewish neo-Gnosticism, the early phase of Cabalism in southern France." Thus, the Jews are really to blame for the Albigensians, and at least partly got what they deserved.

In order to make this claim plausible, it would be necessary first of all to show that the two ideologies are reasonably similar in structure and content, as disclosed by their literature and practices. Secondly, one would have to show that the Cathari could have had sufficient knowledge of the Kabbalah at a formative period in the development of their own ideas to be materially influenced by it.

If Cantor can indeed show these things, he ought to have given us the evidence. What he gives us instead is a piece of ill-grounded speculation, based on a misunderstanding of what he claims is the common root of both, Gnosticism. Here he has been led astray by words (Bloom's in all probability). He knows that both Kabbalah and Catharism have some connection with ancient Gnosticism. He assumes therefore that both are dualistic in the Manichean sense, setting up God and Satan as approximately equal opposing forces.

In fact, if Scholem and his American disciple Bloom are right in relating Kabbalah to Gnosticism, it must have branched off from Gnosticism before the latter took on a radically dualistic form. The Rabbis did mistrust an early form of esoteric Judaism because they suspected its proponents of positing "two powers in heaven."⁵ But these powers were not God and Satan. If anything, Kabbalah shows signs of having become monistic, rather than dualistic. Moreover, it is far from setting up the radical dualism between flesh and spirit characteristic of later Gnosticism and Catharism. Did not the friars use rejection of marriage, never a Jewish heresy, as a

3. Cantor, pp. 177-9, 208.

4. Cantor, p. 178.

5. Cf. Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

test for Catharism? How much social and intellectual contact there may actually have been in the relevant period between Kabbalists and dissident Catholics, I do not know. If Cantor does, he does not tell us, in this book at least.

He also points out that many of the inquisitors were former Jews, though he does not say on what basis he claims that this was true of the majority. He therefore posits a split within the Jewish community between converts and continuing Jews. Those who have totally rejected Judaism, from the Christian converts in the Middle Ages, to Karl Marx in the nineteenth century, are still to be considered as part of the Jewish community. Thus, by a kind of intellectual sleight of hand, it becomes possible to blame the Jews not only for the Catharists but also for their inquisitors.

Given such methodological and other weaknesses, how should we evaluate *The Sacred Chain*? Cantor's book is not a significant contribution to Jewish history, though his reputation as a medieval historian, together with the marketing skills of his publishers, will lead many uninformed readers to believe that they are reading the latest and best scholarship in the field. It should not be put in the hands of first-year students, for it neither provides a reliable factual basis for further research (except in certain areas) nor teaches how to reason from evidence. In fact, this is not a work of historical scholarship, but an extended opinion piece, Cantor's views on the state of contemporary Judaism. On occasion there are flashes of genuine feeling, and occasional shrewd insights, as well as passages of vivid imaginative writing about selected portions of the Jewish past, along with other passages so sloppy and banal that they would hardly be tolerated in a student paper.

What ties them together is his belief that the sacred chain is at its last link, as a result of intermarriage and assimilation, as well as failure to adapt to modernity. This is hardly news. And even the rabbis he despises have long been warning their constituency of this possibility. Of course, this conclusion is not surprising, since he has earlier assured us with complete confidence that the first link is also missing altogether, the one that links the tradition to God through the Torah from Sinai.

His remedy, offered more in despair than in hope, seems to be based on the conviction that even Reform Judaism has not gone nearly far enough in adapting Judaism to modernity. A true encounter with modernity, and even more with post-modernity—with the world of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Noam Chomsky, Harold Bloom, and Jacques Derrida, four Jews he considers principal thinkers of post-modernity⁶—would, he thinks, involve more radical reform than any the reformers of the nineteenth century ever contemplated when they adapted Jewish religion to the liberal Protestant climate of their day. As an emergency measure, he proposes setting up commissions of academics—not rabbis, from whom nothing can be expected, he insists, except mythology and bromides—to engage in radical reform of theology, liturgy, and education. The chances of this happening, as he rightly sees, are somewhat less than of the arrival of the Messiah in the very near future, the only other possibility that in his opinion would save Judaism.

In our time there is a crisis for Judaism as for other religions. But Cantor's proposed remedy will not work, and indeed could only make things worse. In his chauvinism for the Jewish "race," whatever that might be, though not for the Torah which constitutes the real uniqueness of the Jews, he overrates the Jewish contribu-

6. Cantor, pp. 420 ff.

tion to modernity and post-modernity. Modernity as an ideology was in most respects a post-Christian, not a post-Jewish development, and Jews who have bought into it have often been subtly Christianized. How will even further assimilation to a post-Christian culture forge the next link in this particular sacred chain?

If we look at the contemporary Jewish scene in a less partisan light than Cantor does, there are signs of vitality and creativity: perhaps the next precious link is being forged after all. Some young people I know are interested in finding a spiritual foundation for their own lives and for those of their young and future children. The problem for that generation is in no way the nineteenth-century problem of religion and modernity that preoccupies Cantor. They are modern people anyway. They do not approach modernity from tradition, they look at the tradition from the modern standpoint: they simply accept the scientific view of the world as given. They are not concerned about how much of the tradition can be rendered viable in the modern world, by this adaptation or the other. They have no such confidence in modernity anyway. To them, it looks more like a spiritual desert, or perhaps a spiritual Ruanda.

What then do they look for? They will go where they find authentic spiritual vitality and depth—which does not mean that they go for New Age Judaism. If they are Jews, they are not deterred by the demands of observance. They have looked at and perhaps practiced Zen and Yoga, and they know already that spiritual results are not to be expected without effort and commitment. They welcome the sanctification of everyday life that observance promotes. They think Shabbat is wonderful in the rush of modern life—but they mean the real Shabbat, not a watered down Protestant version that does not go much beyond driving to synagogue.

To an extent that amazes me, they are not deterred by the intellectual problems that bothered my generation or Cantor's. Either they are willing to live with some degree of intellectual contradiction, or they simply manage to transcend the problem by their emphasis on the spiritual dimension of religion. And since most of them find any form of Judaism that does not stress observance boring, and too like what they know already, they will usually opt for Modern Orthodoxy, Sephardic Orthodoxy where available, or some other form of traditional Judaism. Perhaps more surprisingly, a sizable number of disillusioned former Christians seem to be discovering an answer to their spiritual needs in traditional Judaism. If anything can be generalized from these limited observations, it might be that the remedy is not more intellectual assimilation to modernity, but a very old, very simple and very difficult one: more connection of religion with spirituality, and—let's say it right out loud—with God.

Here we may usefully return to another notable contradiction in Cantor's program. He tells us that the sacred chain is being broken, that the Jewish people is losing its identity and will merge with American or with Middle Eastern culture. But he also tells us that the Orthodox, in North America or in Israel, will remain Orthodox, even though he thinks that there is no prospect of their relative numbers increasing to anything beyond about fifteen percent.⁷ This too seems to be pure speculation, in view of the empirical evidence of renewed Orthodox vitality and demographic growth. Evidently those for whom the chain is really sacred will hold

7. Cantor, p. 415.

on to their end of it. Again, let us remind ourselves that these are the people who, unlike Cantor, also think that the chain had a beginning.

So what's new about this situation? It is obvious from the Bible, a more honest literary source than Cantor will concede, that the majority were always prone to assimilate, whether to Canaanite idolatry and syncretism, to Hellenistic culture, or to sheer falling away from the ethical demands of the Torah. If archaeology tells us that the cult was syncretistic and even polytheistic in biblical times, we already knew that from the prophets. I fancy that at many periods in Jewish history, except where Jews lived in isolation, the majority were not faithful to the Torah. The minority were the ones that kept the faith, and forged a new link in the sacred chain that could be passed to the next generation.

It would be a serious oversimplification to identify that minority exclusively with the Orthodox group today, or to deny that there are real intellectual challenges in modernity, or whatever will succeed it, that need to be faced. Foremost among these in my judgment is the return of the Jewish people into history in their own state. Must they indeed be a nation like all the other nations, or does the call of Israel to be precisely different from the others, because of the gift of the Torah, now take on social dimensions once more, transcending the narrow horizons of personal religion so important in the Diaspora?

We can return to our first questions. If Cantor's book, whatever its merits or demerits, is an instructive example of the wrong way to go, can we point to a better one? Is it possible, as so many Jews and Christians have supposed in the last historical period, to combine faith in revelation with honest critical scholarship? The fundamentalists continue to deny the possibility out of hand, while the determined skeptics treat every new development in critical scholarship as fresh justification for their own negative convictions.

For the historical scholar, even and especially in the field of religion, the first and perhaps the last commandment is the prohibition of idolatry. For the believer, God and truth are identical. Since I first heard it, I have always been deeply impressed by a saying of one of the nineteenth century theosophists: There is no religion higher than truth. We cannot serve God with falsehoods, no matter what religious patina they may have acquired over the centuries.

Much Jewish tradition contends, against Christianity, that it is unconditionally impossible to know God's essence or nature. According to this view, we can only know his attributes. But organized religion often wants to know more than is possible, and to afford the believer a degree of security that in the nature of things is not available. For if we cannot know God directly, it follows that we can never have a decisive intellectual proof of a historical revelation. Thus theology reinforces the modern insight that an eternal and necessary truth cannot be deduced from a contingent historical fact. If the archaeologists were to find the missing Ark of the Covenant, and within it the original two tablets of the Law, there would still be no proof of divine revelation.

We may have a connection with God, through the mitzvot, for example, for Jews, or through prayer. But this will not give us access to privileged knowledge of historical facts unavailable to the skeptic. Faith cannot legitimately be used to fill up gaps in the historical record. The position of the agnostic or atheist is always a respectable one. Indeed, critical belief will often find itself more at home in such company than among the uncritical believers.

Simple empiricism is vulnerable to the insights of the deconstructionists. Objectivity remains the only proper goal, but one more distant than empiricists suppose. Facts are not simply there; they are constituted by the interplay of data and interpretation. Interpretation is thus an inescapable aspect of historical work, but self-criticism is needed to keep it from subjectivism. We have to use our historical imagination to see what the people of the past took for granted, and critical self-awareness to see what we ourselves take for granted. Cantor and Bloom think people in the First Temple period wrote historical novels. This is modern projection. Almost certainly they reverently passed on sacred traditions, no doubt coloring them from their own experiences.

Can we not respect the otherness of the past, its right to be different from the present and not necessarily worse? Many hard scientists feel reverence for the infinite mystery and complexity of the world. Religious historians need such a scholarly equivalent of the fear of God. It is a virtue sadly lacking in Cantor's book.

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Black-Jewish Relations Revisited

What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance. By MURRAY FRIEDMAN. New York: Free Press, 1995. 423 pp., \$24.95.

Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments. Edited by PAUL BERMAN, ed. New York: Delacorte Press, 1994. 303 pp., \$22.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD S. SHAPIRO

These two books are the latest additions to a long list of volumes on the history of Black-Jewish relations in the United States. Indeed, more has been written by historians, sociologists, and novelists about the relationship between Blacks and Jews than that between any of America's other ethnic groups. It was perhaps not accidental that in the 1950s movie "The Defiant Ones," a story of two convicts who had escaped from a southern chain gang chained to one another, the white convict was played by Tony Curtis. A New York Jew, Curtis'

name had been Bernie Schwartz before he arrived in Hollywood. For better or worse, the fate of America's Blacks and Jews has seemed to be inextricably intertwined, an issue that Stephen J. Whitfield, a distinguished scholar of American ethnic history and professor of American Studies at Brandeis University, examined in his essay "An Anatomy of Black Anti-Semitism," which appeared in the Fall, 1994 number of JUDAISM.

Murray Friedman, the Middle Atlantic States director of the American Jewish Committee and the head of the Center for American Jewish History at Temple University, has written a sprightly and engrossing history of Black-Jewish relations from the time of slavery to the present day. He effectively refutes such conspiracy devotees as Khalid Muhammad, Harold Cruse, and David Levering Lewis, who have argued that Jews have sought to manipulate Blacks

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for their own purposes. Friedman, by contrast, emphasizes that such an interpretation cannot explain the activities of Allard Lowenstein, Kivie Kaplan, or Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, who were murdered in Mississippi while doing voter-registration work among the state's Blacks. Without the votes of Jews, Harold Washington in Chicago, Wilson Goode in Philadelphia, and David Dinkins in New York City would never have been elected mayors of these cities. And these votes came mainly from lower-middle and middle-class Jews who were not in a position to manipulate Blacks or anyone else. As the title and subtitle of his book indicate, however, Friedman is concerned with more than merely describing the history of the Black-Jewish relationship. He also wants to know why the "alliance" between the two groups has collapsed and what this means for Blacks and Jews living in the 1990s.

Blacks and Jews, by contrast, is a collection of nineteen essays by prominent African-Americans and Jews on Black-Jewish relations, and it is useful to have them together in one volume. Fourteen of the essays were previously published, including two famous essays, "My Negro Problem—and Ours" (1963) by Norman Podhoretz and "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White" (1967) by James Baldwin. Other contributors include Clayborne Carson ("The Politics of Relations between African-Americans and Jews"), Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ("The Uses of Anti-Semitism, with Memoirs of an Anti-Anti-Semite"), Julius Lester ("The Lives People Live"), Cornel West ("On Black-Jewish Relations"), Andrew Hacker ("Jewish Racism, Black Anti-Semitism"), and Jim Sleeper ("The Battle for Enlightenment at City College").

The contemporary interest in Black-Jewish relations stems in part from the

well-publicized rift between the two groups. Since the 1960s, Jews and Blacks have locked horns over affirmative action, the Arab-Israel conflict, and turf in New York City and elsewhere, and the likelihood that the schism between the two groups can be healed is problematic. Not surprisingly, both books look back wistfully to the 1960s when the moral choices facing the country were simpler, when Jews and Blacks fought and died alongside one another in behalf of civil rights and economic and social reform, and when they seemed to have a common core of interests and values.

Friedman and the contributors to *Blacks and Jews* share two questionable assumptions. The first is that the entente between Blacks and Jews ever approached the nature of an "alliance," a word found in the subtitles of both books. In fact, for the vast majority of Jews and Blacks this "alliance" was never more than a marriage of convenience. The second assumption is that the 1960s were a golden age of Black-Jewish relations. The Black-Jewish relationship was never as warm as its most fervent advocates claimed, or as one-sided as the most skeptical Blacks contended. Blacks and Jews cooperated because it was in their interest to do so.

As the Friedman and Berman volumes make clear, Jews and Blacks are both to blame for the deterioration of relations between them. Jews are America's quintessential liberals, and their liberalism has led them to exaggerate the similarities between their experience in America and that of African-Americans, and to claim that the two peoples share a history of victimization. Jews wished to believe that, unlike other Americans, Jews and Blacks were natural allies, able instinctively to empathize with the other's plight. Both groups had once been slaves, and both continued to be victims of prejudice and discrimina-

tion. Jews assumed that anything less than warm ties between Blacks and Jews was a betrayal of the two communities' sacred compact to work together to destroy bias. Looking at the situation through rose-colored glasses inevitably led to disenchantment when African-Americans refused to perform the role outlined for them in the liberal scenario.

Jews tended to overlook the far more important historical and sociological differences between the two groups, as well as the fact that African-Americans have not believed that the Jewish experience in America has been at all comparable to their own. The Jews, after all, have been the classic American ethnic success story, while perhaps a quarter of African-Americans remain mired in poverty and racked with seemingly insoluble social and cultural afflictions. If in 1938 Irving Berlin could write "God Bless America," Langston Hughes could write in that same year that "America was never America to me." In his essay "The Lives People Live," reprinted in *Blacks and Jews*, Julius Lester emphasizes that "what often comes out as Black anti-Semitism is an attempt to express resentment toward Jews for assuming a relationship of shared suffering."

Jews, however, are not solely to blame for the worsening of relations. African-Americans are the only group in America in which anti-Semitism has increased during the last decade, in which anti-Semites are not immediately repudiated, and in which anti-Semitism comes from the top down. Where else are there significant religious, academic, communal, and political leaders espousing hatred of Jews?

The Friedman and Berman volumes highlight the connection between the deterioration of Black-Jewish relations and the political extremism which characterizes the rhetoric of many contemporary Black spokesmen. At a time when

the middle class is rapidly expanding, and when Colin Powell is being mentioned seriously as a Republican vice-presidential candidate, some African-American leaders would have us believe that a race war is currently taking place in America, that proposals to reduce government spending are inherently racist, and that nothing has fundamentally changed in their social and economic position over the past several decades. Even such a normally sober figure as Julius Lester asks us whether we can envisage the hatred felt by a Black "who knows that he or she is of absolutely no use socially, economically, politically? Can you imagine the rage in one who knows that his or her existence simply does not matter?" The hopelessness, nihilism, and despair in Black America, Lester concludes, "is indescribable."

For Blacks, Jews serve as a screen upon which they can project their rage and alienation from American society. Blacks see in Jews what they want to see, and perhaps the most important thing they see are beneficiaries of America's liberal society. This society is abhorrent to a growing number of radicalized Black leaders who preach the new gospel of "identity politics." Black anti-Semitism is merely one aspect, and certainly not the most important aspect, of the contemporary struggle between those preaching integration and those preaching estrangement from America. This disaffection is also seen in the African names given to Black children, in the rejection of Christianity and the adoption of Islam and African religious holidays, in the sympathy for Third World enemies of the United States, in the belief that O. J. Simpson and other Black defendants cannot get fair trials, and in the self-segregation of Blacks on the college campus.

African-American professor Derrick Bell acted out this alienation when a few

years ago he gave up a tenured position at the Harvard Law School, ostensibly to protest the alleged under-representation on the school's faculty of Black women. In truth, his disaffection involved more than a disagreement over the academy's hiring practices. Harvard is, after all, the nation's leading university, and as such is part of that national establishment which Blacks such as Bell find so abhorrent. In his 1992 book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, Bell contended that Gunnar Myrdal had been wrong a half century earlier when in *An American Dilemma* he posited a conflict between America's political and cultural values on the one hand and its racial practices on the other. According to Bell, American ideals of individual rights, equality before the law, private enterprise, and free-market capitalism are themselves racist and inevitably "lead to legal results that harm blacks and perpetuate their inferior status." African-Americans who accept such principles resemble those slaves who were "willing to mimic the masters' views, carry out orders, and by their presence provide a perverse legitimacy to the oppression they aided and approved." Bell believes, as he states in his piece in *Blacks and Jews*, that those who condemn Louis Farrakhan at the behest of Jews also exhibit a "Plantation Mentality."

A logical corollary of such thinking is that Jews, who have been among the prime beneficiaries of America's liberal society and the most vigorous defenders of individual rights and equality before the law, are objectively anti-Black, despite all their aid to the civil rights movement chronicled by Friedman. Radical Blacks naturally resent the advice of Jews to follow their example of self-help through bootstrap economics and education. In his contribution to *Blacks and Jews*, Cornel West, a professor of religion at Harvard, notes that

such advice is scorned by those who believe that the visibility of Jews in the media, the professions, and the academy has been due less to hard work than to "favoritism and nepotism."

The anti-Semitism of Black radicals has also been prompted by the rapid and largely self-impelled social and economic advancement of American Jewry. Such anti-Semitism is more than a matter of envy. America's Jews provide an example of ethnic betterment which competes with the radical identity politics of Black nationalists. It is not surprising that Jews should defend the merit principle since it has served them so well. Nor is it strange that Blacks, in light of their history, should be skeptical about such a principle or view the commitment of Jews to a meritocracy as self-serving and even anti-Black.

According to West, Blacks are America's "permanent underdog," and naturally resent any efforts by Jews to horn in on the victimization racket. This has led some to slight Jewish suffering. For Jews, the single most revolting thing about Khalid Muhammad has been his downplaying of the Holocaust. But, from Muhammad's perspective, this was necessary if his people were to retain their position as America's preeminent victims.

This view of their status as permanent victims of a monolithic white population determined to keep them down has led to the denial or minimization of the contributions of Jews to the civil rights movement. Otherwise, the gloomy picture of white America would have to be modified. Thus Clayborne Carson, a professor of history at Stanford University, stresses in *Blacks and Jews* that Jewish supporters of the civil rights movement have been eccentric, "culturally marginal, racially tolerant individuals," and not representative of the larger Jewish population.

Also indicative of the estrangement of Black intellectuals from America are their attacks on Israel. The great sin of Israel is that it is part of the West and has a close relationship with the United States. For Cornel West, the support of American Jews for Israel during the 1980s was solely a matter of "naked group interest" which reflected "an abandonment of substantive moral deliberation." The premise that the friend (Israel) of my enemy (the United States) is my enemy has encouraged some to see Israel and its American Jewish supporters as opponents of Black liberation. Thus West asserts that the support of Jews for Israel has blinded them to what "the symbolic predicament and literal plight of Palestinians in Israel means to Blacks." Such an attitude is understandable if one believes, as do Black radicals, that the dominant thrust of American foreign policy is neo-imperialistic, that Zionism is a form of western colonialism, and that the Palestinians stand in the same relationship to the United States as do the residents of Harlem and Watts. It is doubtful, however, whether Blacks, apart from the radicals, are particularly concerned with the condition of the Palestinians or draw analogies between their own situation and that of the Palestinians.

Others have been less circumspect than West in attacking Israel. In 1980 when his political and financial ambitions were not as advanced, Jesse Jackson described Zionism as "a kind of poisonous weed." Kwame Toure, the former Stokely Carmichael, agreed. "The only good Zionist is a dead Zionist," he told a meeting at the University of Maryland in 1986. "We must take a lesson from Hitler."

One of the questions raised by the Friedman and Berman volumes concerns their focus on the Black intelligentsia. The stance of Black intellectuals toward Jews and Israel probably does

not tell us very much about the attitudes of the proverbial Black in the street. Recent polls indicate that he is not as antagonistic toward Jews as statements from some of his self-appointed leaders would suggest. Polls among Jews, by contrast, indicate that the average Jew is less eager than Jewish spokesmen to court Blacks. This division between Black and Jewish leaders and their constituencies is not a recent phenomenon, and this poses the question of whether the Black-Jewish "alliance" was ever anything more than an elitist and artificial phenomenon.

That the clashes between Blacks and Jews in New York City have not been replicated in other cities might have something to do with the fact that New York is not only the center of the mass media but also has the largest and most vocal collection of Black radical intellectuals. New York is one of the few places in America that can support a radio station such as WLIB which disseminates the message of radical Black identity politics and Black nationalism. Not surprisingly, the most prominent Black anti-Semites include Leonard Jeffries of the City University of New York and Tony Martin of Wellesley College. Nor is it unexpected that the chief venue for Khalid Muhammad's diatribes are college campuses.

For Jews, the most traumatic events in recent Black-Jewish relations were the 1991 anti-Semitic riot in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn and the subsequent murder of Yankel Rosenbaum by a mob of young Blacks. Perhaps the most important fact about these episodes was that they were the only ones of their kind. If Black-Jewish relationships never attained the status of a sacred covenant fancied by the American Left, neither have they approached the nightmare imagined by the beleaguered Jews of Brooklyn.

Neither Friedman nor the contributors to *Blacks and Jews* offer more than bromides to alleviate Black-Jewish tensions. The best that Friedman can do is to hope for "a new realism." Perhaps the most that Blacks and Jews can do in these difficult times, he concludes, "is to become less preoccupied with one another and simply try to stay out of each other's way. While Blacks appear to understand this option, many Jews do not. Frequently they press for dialogue, assuming that present bad feelings can be cleared up if only Jews and Blacks get together and talk things out. Blacks will sometimes indulge Jews in these efforts, but such gestures are at best halfhearted."

At least Friedman makes a stab at realism. The contributors to *Blacks and Jews*, by and large, are nostalgic for that golden age of the 1960s when Blacks and Jews purportedly stood shoulder to shoulder in behalf of social change and

racial uplift. Clayborne Carson claims that the two groups still remain "the most dependable sources of support for social change." Cornel West contends that Jews have a stake in that "redistribution of wealth and power" which will help stave off xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Paul Berman agrees. "The American Jews and the African-Americans are who they are because of long centuries of a past that can be put to different uses but cannot be overcome," he writes in his essay "The Other and the Almost the Same." "It was the past that made the Blacks and the Jews almost the same, and the past has the singular inconvenience of never going away." But America's Jews and African-Americans have hardly ever been "almost the same." The belief that they have been is a major obstacle to that realism about Black-Jewish relations that is so important today.

World War II – A Dual Perspective

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Siena College is continuing its sponsorship of annual, international, multidisciplinary conferences on the Anniversary of World War II – but now on two levels. The foci for 1996 will be 1946, World War II – The Aftermath, and 1936, World War II – The Preliminary Period. In the first focus, papers dealing with displaced persons, War Crimes Trials, Literary and Cinematic studies of the war, veterans' affairs, the G.I. Bill and economic reconversion, as well as papers dealing with broad issues of earlier years will be welcome. In the second focus, papers on the rise of Fascism, Japan and China, Italy and Ethiopia, The League of Nations, Arms and Armament, Military Doctrine, The Spanish Civil War, Pacifism, the impact of World War I, etc., will all be appropriate as well as many others. In either focus, art, music, women's and minorities studies will be of interest. Other topics of relevance are also welcome.

Send replies and inquiries to: Professor Thomas O. Kelly, II

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Deadline for submissions: **December 1, 1995**

Send: Brief (1-3 pg) outline or abstract of the proposal with some sense of sources, archive materials, etc., consulted and a recent C.V. or brief biographical sketch.

JUDAISM

There are intellectual challenges in modernity, or whatever will succeed it, that need to be faced. Foremost among these is the return of the Jewish people into history in their own state. Must they indeed be a nation like all the other nations, or does the call of Israel to be precisely different from the others, because of the gift of the Torah, now take on social dimensions once more, transcending the narrow horizons of personal religion so important in the Diaspora?

— William Nicholls
Writing Religious History



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